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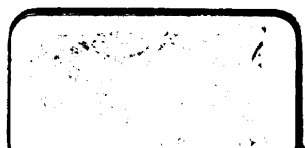
BY THE AUTHOR OF "HUNTED TO DEATH"

# MAUDE LUTON

A NOVEL.

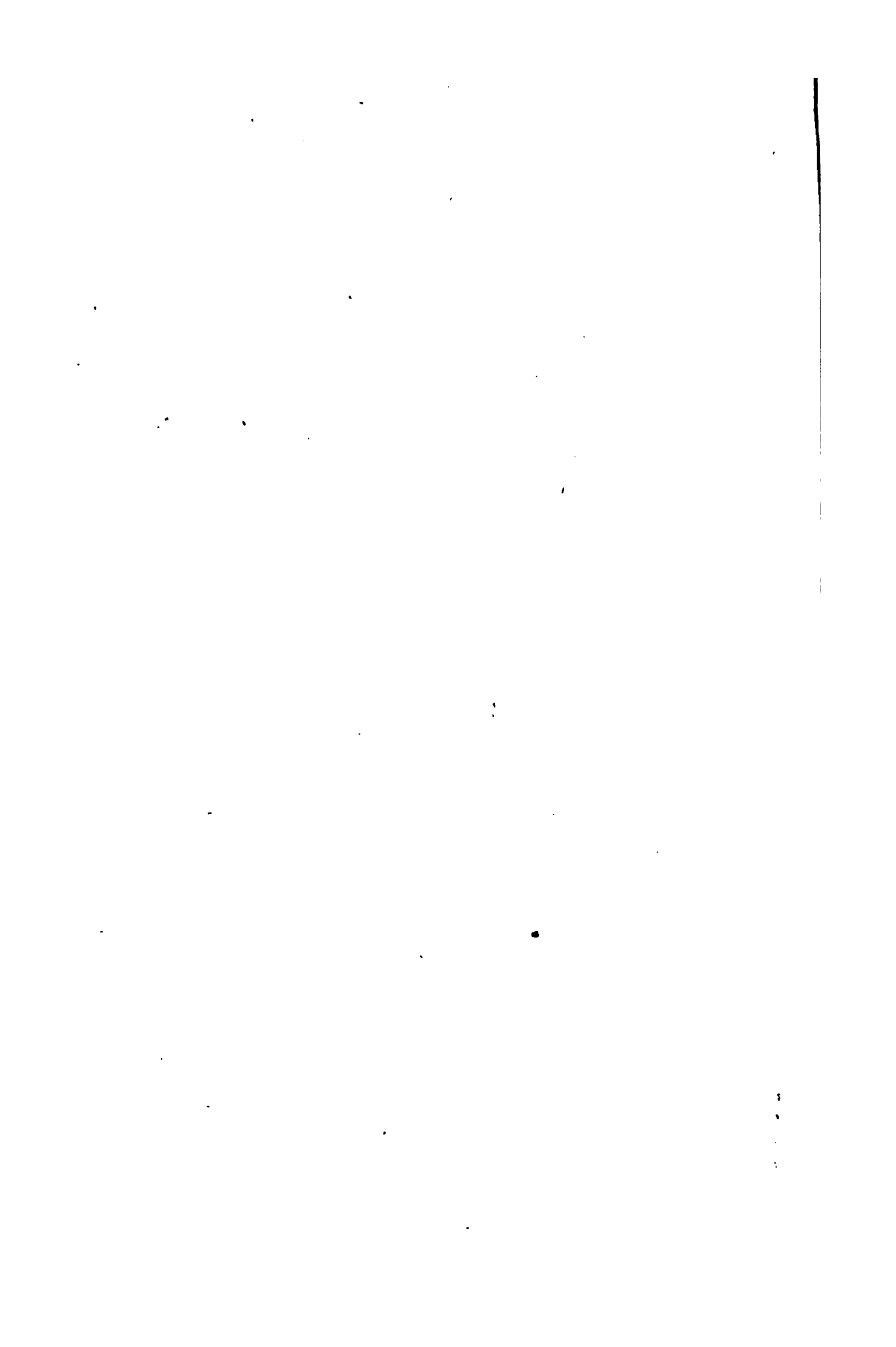


LONDON, WARD, LOCK & TYLER









# MAUDE LUTON

## A Novel

BY

W. STEPHENS HAYWARD

AUTHOR OF "HUNTED TO DEATH;" "LOVE AGAINST THE WORLD;"  
"ETHEL GREY," ETC.



LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

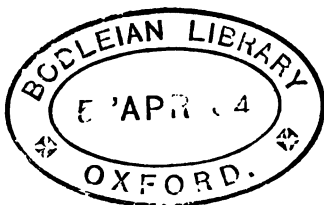
WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

1875.

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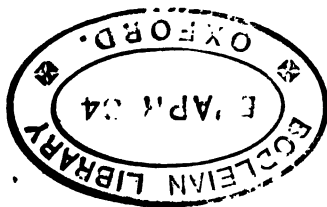
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# CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO MAUDE LUTON & LABURNUM HOUSE	5
II. A TERRIBLE SCANDAL	17
III. DAY DREAMS AND A PROPHECY	34
IV. AN INVITATION TO CUMBERFORD	47
V. MAUDE LUTON AND TOM HOPTON	58
VI. A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT	71
VII. THE DYING WORDS OF DR. LUTON	78
VIII. TOM HOPTON'S THEORIES AND SPECULATIONS	91
IX. THE PROPHECY FULFILLED	100
X. MAUDE CONFIDES IN HER COUSIN	113
XI. MAUDE RESOLVES TO OBTAIN HER RIGHTS	125
XII. DAVENPORT SEEKS THE CLUE TO MAUDE'S HISTORY	136
XIII. SYDNEY DAVENPORT ASKS A SERIOUS QUESTION	142
XIV. MOLLY RUMBLE'S REVELATION	146
XV. MAUDE MAKES HER PLANS FOR THE FUTURE	154
XVI. "NOBODY'S DAUGHTER!"	164
XVII. A CALAMITY AT HOLFORD HALL	177
XVIII. AN EXTRAORDINARY MISTAKE	185
XIX. THE PICTURE GALLERY	203
XX. THE TWO MAUDES	213
XXI. DOROTHY CLARKE'S HUMILIATION	225
XXII. MAUDE LUTON GROWS JEALOUS OF THE HEIRESS	232
XXIII. IN THE LAWYER'S OFFICE	243

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV. A NEW HOME . . . . .	255
XXV. A MYSTERIOUS CORRESPONDENCE . . . . .	268
XXVI. A STRANGE ADVENTURE . . . . .	278
XXVII. THE BEGINNING OF A PLOT . . . . .	284
XXVIII. THE TWO MAUDES . . . . .	291
XXIX. SOLOMON ESHER'S DEN . . . . .	296
XXX. INDIAN HEMP . . . . .	307
XXXI. DAVID HEARS BAD NEWS . . . . .	317
XXXII. THE HEIRESS ASSERTS HER RIGHTS . . . . .	324
XXXIII. DAVID SEES THE MISTRESS OF HOLFORD HALL . . . . .	334
XXXIV. MR. MELHUISE MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY . . . . .	340
XXXV. THE SCHEMER IS FOILED . . . . .	345
XXXVI. SYDNEY DAVENPORT ARRIVES AT HOLFORD HALL . . . . .	351
XXXVII. AN UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW . . . . .	355
XXXVIII. THE MARRIAGE REGISTER FOUND.—CONCLUSION . . . . .	360

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# MAUDE LUTON.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO MAUDE LUTON AND  
LABURNUM HOUSE.

THE Scene—a modern drawing-room, with all the appliances, ornaments, and elegancies which modern taste demands. Two middle-aged ladies are seated in this room in conversation.

These two ladies, the Misses Martin, own and conduct between them the establishment for young ladies known as Laburnum House. It is situate west of the Marble Arch, on the confines of aristocratic Kensington.

“Such an elegant girl!—so accomplished,” exclaimed Miss Ruth Martin, the younger sister.

“Yes,” replied the other, “and so showy and attractive too. The girl is a credit to us—a standing advertisement of the refined and aristocratic system of culture in Laburnum House. She has high breeding, such breeding as can

only be obtained at a first-class establishment like ours, stamped on her every action, her carriage, her look."

"Then I am sure," said the other, "that it was her manifest elegance and refinement which induced Lady Bouverie to send her two daughters. You know, last Christmas, instead of going to her uncle, she went on a visit to Berkeley Hall with her friend the Honourable Miss Faversham. There she met, of course, Lady Faversham, and Lady Bouverie, who, with a growing-up family of seven daughters, was casting about for some educational establishment—of course aristocratic, refined, and not too extravagant."

"Our terms are moderate enough," said the elder sister. "A hundred guineas, including everything, with the exception of singing and Italian masters, riding, the harp and a few other trifles, which together do not amount to forty pounds, is *very* reasonable."

"It is extremely provoking, the girl has a power of charming, fascinating all who come in contact with her—at least all whom she chooses. As a pupil governess she would be invaluable; and were it possible she could be retained as a permanent assistant, we could afford her the most liberal terms."

"For my part, I cannot quite understand how her uncle, who must be pretty well off to have educated her in such an expensive manner, can design her for the life of a governess."

"O, I can explain that," replied Ruth, "she has at times, in her fitful, uncertain way, bestowed scraps of her confidence on me. It appears she is an orphan, and on coming of age will have some two thousand pounds at her

disposal. Her uncle, Dr. Luton, has a fair practice but is not rich ; and has besides, a son and invalid daughter to provide for. When this girl was fourteen years of age he called her to him, and plainly told her the state of the case—that the interest of her money would be insufficient to live upon; and that if anything should happen to him he would not be able to leave her more than a trifle—perhaps not more than five hundred pounds or so, according to the time he might be spared. Maude thereupon decided that she would like to receive an education which should fit her for making her own way in the world—at all events for earning her own living. Even at that early period she had given evidence of great musical ability; and her voice, undeveloped and uncultivated, promised to be a magnificent one. That these early indications led her to a correct estimate of her own ability and power, we have good evidence, sister. Obviously enough, the first idea which presented itself alike to uncle and niece was that by educating her in such a manner as to be able to impart a first-rate aristocratic instruction to pupils, she would gain the means of a certain livelihood, and might besides cultivate, and in time avail herself of, her voice and musical talent. So it seems it was settled; and she came to us for four years, on the understanding that she might at the end of that time remain as pupil-teacher, and continue for two years more to receive the advantage of the foreign professors and masters we have engaged; after which time either party would be at liberty to make any other engagement. It yet wants five months of the four years; and now, suddenly, the head-strong girl declares she will leave at a moment's notice."



"Well, if she will, she must," said the elder, "but it is certainly very provoking. I would willingly pay her fifty pounds a year to remain; and even forego the charge for the last quarter, which will be in itself over thirty pounds."

"I am afraid there is no chance of it, sister; unless—unless——"

Miss Ruth Martin here hesitated considerably, and her sister asked sharply—"Unless what?"

"You know the girl stated publicly at the tea-table last night that she should leave the establishment, if Miss Clarke remained; and having so stated openly and before everyone, I believe she would suffer martyrdom rather than retract."

"Ruth, you must be mad! You cannot think I will submit to be dictated to in my own house, in presence of my pupils, who I am to retain and who dismiss from the establishment. Besides Miss Clarke has a younger sister, and in the natural course of things we may expect she will be sent here. The Clarkes are highly respectable people."

"Her father is a farmer only, Maude Luton says."

"A gentleman farmer."

"I understood her merely a tenant farmer—tenant at the will, in fact, of the great people in that neighbourhood—the De Veres."

"If Miss Clarke has done wrong I will compel her to apologise. But I will not be dictated to, even by Miss Luton, with whom you, Sister, seem perfectly infatuated."

"I thought you agreed with me that she was a highly desirable pupil. Nay more——"

"I grant all that Ruth," said the elder, interrupting.

"Nevertheless, I must and will enforce discipline, even at the penalty of losing Miss Luton." She spoke determinedly—even a little harshly; and by the way she set her lips it was apparent she was determined to bear down Miss Ruth's too warm advocacy of Maude Luton's claims to consideration. But Miss Ruth was not even yet quite silenced.

"Ah! but suppose that in losing her we lose not only Miss Maude Luton, but also her friend, the Honourable Miss Faversham, and even the two Misses Bouverie. I fully believe that Maude could persuade Clara Faversham to do exactly as she pleased. She seems to have unlimited influence over her friend."

Miss Martin at this grew grave and thoughtful. But presently she spoke out—

"We have never injured Maude Luton, Ruth; we have always treated her kindly; indeed, we have never had any reason to find fault with the girl—her conduct has been faultless. I am inclined to think that she is well-disposed towards us; at all events,"—this Miss Martin said quite decisively—"I am quite sure the girl will never seek to do us a wilful injury. I think I understand her disposition, and I feel sure that though she would repay an injury with relentless and lasting hostility, she will not seek to harm us because she has quarrelled with this Clarke girl. Suppose we have Miss Luton up, and see exactly how affairs are. If she has made up her mind to go, she will go—I know Maude Luton well enough for that; but I also feel assured that she will never attempt to revenge her quarrel with her schoolfellow on us."

Miss Martin rose, rang the bell, sent for Miss Luton,

and seating herself on the other side of the hearth-rug opposite her sister, awaited the coming of her pupil.

We will take advantage of the opportunity to devote a few words to the sisters, and to Laburnum House. Their history is, I fancy, a common one. Both had been educated for, and had passed their youths as governesses. The elder Miss Martin having received a legacy from an aunt of five hundred pounds, thought she could not better employ it than add it to her own and her sister's savings, and start a ladies' school. Fortunately the sisters had been out in good families and had good introductions and recommendations available, and were enabled to commence their new venture with ten pupils. This number in the next two half-years swelled to eighteen, and at the time of which we speak, the establishment numbered twenty-seven young ladies, ranging in age from twelve to eighteen. The school was really well conducted, and the plan of education in strict conformity with the fashionable requirements of that class of society for whose daughters it was intended. The terms were a hundred guineas a year, and for this the usual branches of a fashionable education were duly taught, and masters provided for French, German, music and dancing.

Situate in the fashionable neighbourhood of Kensington, the Misses Martin's establishment offered many advantages to such people of moderate wealth and position as were ambitious of pushing their daughters into a higher sphere than that in which they themselves moved. It was also peculiarly well adapted to a girl who aimed to become herself an accomplished governess in families of distinction, as did Maude Luton.

Girl as she was at the time when her uncle frankly un-

folded to her her position and prospects, she had yet knowledge of the world enough to be well aware that the profession of governess was almost the only one open to a young lady in the present state of society. She had read much about the hardships and contumely to which these "genteel drudges" are subject; but she had sense enough to see that this was the case only among those of the class not competent to impart a first-rate education—in short, those only who by their own training and education were inadmissible as teachers to the daughters of the aristocracy, and were compelled to accept situations in families of the middle and lower-middle, or as it has been well called, the shabby-genteel class. It was among these latter families, she shrewdly opined, that parsimony in food and wage were combined with arrogance and harshness; and for this sort of people Miss Maude Luton, conceived a genuine horror, and early determined ever to shun all association with any representative thereof.

Her aristocratic instincts and profound contempt for the *canaille*, as she considered the lower-middle class, would have befitted the proud daughter of one of our most ancient and noble families. And yet Maude Luton, with all her high-born sentiments and aristocratic leanings, which almost seemed a part of her nature, was only the niece of a country surgeon, a general practitioner.

There was something in the girl's manner, however, which no stranger with the least power of observation failed to remark, and when one was constantly in her presence it was all but impossible to resist the fascination she exercised. She had not been six months in the establishment of the Misses Martin ere they discovered that they

had in their new pupil a gem, perchance a jewel of the first water. Her manner was quiet and ladylike, her deportment easy and graceful, her language refined, elegant, always well chosen, and the matter of her conversation such that no fault could be found with it. In the then small assemblage ruled over by the sisters Martin, Miss Maude Luton at fifteen years of age at once attained an undisputed pre-eminence. She was always perfect in her French and Italian exercises; the music-master declared her progress was wonderful, her "touch," and "execution," all that could be desired. As for the singing-master, Signor Luigi Torriato, he listened to her rich, pure soprano voice with mingled pleasure and dismay—pleasure at the thought of having so promising a pupil, and dismay, or a feeling akin thereto, when he became aware that she could sing both higher and lower than himself, and that there was very little he could teach her. The music-master, too, soon had to give up exercises and practice, and acknowledge that in execution she at least equalled himself; thereupon he fell back on the study of harmony—a subject not particularly interesting, and which he hoped would steady her, for some time at least.

But lo! in a couple of months Miss Maude Luton was perfect in "thorough bass," and in a very little time could compose music with marvellous rapidity and correctness. Polka, galop, fantasia, flowed at will and right rapidly from that facile musical brain-organ to the slender fingers, and where thence transferred in black dots, bars, and strokes, to a sheet of ruled paper.

Give the young lady but a snatch of a song or ballad, and in half an hour she would have composed and written

down an admirable little air thereto. Drawing and painting too were favourite studies, or rather amusements, with this clever girl; and she could, and did, execute some really tolerable miniature portraits of her schoolfellows. But with all her efforts she could not satisfy herself with the likeness obtained. In vain she repeated the process again and again; there was always a great similitude, but never a faithful likeness, and this was what Maude Luton aimed at, and what she was determined to attain.

Now, she was not a girl to set her mind on an object and be content with crying for it like a child. By the time she had been a year with the Misses Martin she had formed a friendship with a schoolfellow, by name Lydia Paton. This young lady was the very opposite of herself. Timid, retiring, unobtrusive, with nothing remarkable either in mind or body—a shy, tender-hearted little fawn, brown-haired, and with brown eyes, which filled with tears at an unkind word. She was the daughter of a clergyman, and, like Maude, intended to be a governess—from necessity certainly, and, her friend could not help thinking, not from her own choice—Lydia seemed so utterly unfitted to rule others; she who, though a year older than Maude, looked up to her, and clung to her for aid and protection. Miss Luton could not help smiling to herself as she pictured timid Lydia with three or four great, unruly, vulgar girls to keep in order and educate into gentlewomen. However, Maude was determined to have a good portrait of her friend, and one of her own execution too; and for this she laboured long and indefatigably.

But when she had been two years at Laburnum House

she had not yet succeeded. Her desk had dozens of portraits in various states of progress ; some thrown aside when scarce commenced, by reason of some real or fancied defect ; others completed, but all in her judgment unworthy. Then she sought the aid of the drawing-master, who touched up one himself, assisted her to colour it, made a few trivial alterations, and pronounced it perfect. But Maude's lip curled, and in secret she tore it up with contempt.'

At last almost in despair, she purchased a small set of photographic apparatus, and diligently set to work learning the manipulation. It took another six months ere she could take good negatives on paper ; but she persevered, undaunted by stained fingers and many failures, until she could produce sun-pictures which would not have disgraced the specimen-case of many a West End photographer. Then, having selected one which she considered all but faultless, she commenced to tint and colour it, and in the course of a week produced a vignette portrait of Lydia Paton startlingly lifelike. There were the mild brown eyes, the soft wavy hair, the sweet smile, and even the very expression, all seized, and imprinted on the paper. She took the utmost pains to obliterate all signs of the portrait being founded on a photograph ; and when she had done all she could, put in every possible finishing-touch, with conscious triumph she showed it to the drawing-master and class assembled. To say it excited admiration and astonishment scarcely expresses enough.

Mr. Barrand was incredulous at first, and indeed for some considerable time. It was so exquisitely finished in

every detail as to render impossible the thought that it could have been done by a school-girl—almost self-taught. *Almost self-taught!* Ay, there was the sting! She devoted very little time or attention to his lessons, but worked persistently on alone. However, when she showed her many failures and partially successful attempts, incredulity was forced to give way. Indeed, Maude was determined it should do so. She had made up her mind to have the credit and glory of this, as of every other achievement. It was a trait of her character, and a very prominent one. Maude further possessed great application—a nature ignorant of the meaning of defeat. Once let her fix her eye on an object, and if it were attainable by mortal girl, Maude Luton would grasp it; and having grasped it, would hold it up, and cry, triumphantly, “See! I have got it!”

Gifted, over and above her great and undoubted talents, with a winning manner and most pleasing and unembarrassed address, it is not surprising that this young lady should have asserted a certain superiority among her companions—not offensively, nor indeed at all, as far as any one could see, by any direct word or art; but tacitly, as it were by consent, she glided into the first place.

When she had been there two years, the Misses Martin never thought of restricting or questioning her. When she asked permission for anything, it was in a manner as though it were a mere form, a giving notice—in fact, a matter of courtesy.

“I have a few purchases to make, Miss Martin. Miss Paton and I were thinking of walking out to make them this afternoon?”



"Very well, Maude ; do not be gone too long."

"Not a moment longer than necessary, Miss Martin."

Supposing Miss Luton had walked into the room one day, when an acquaintance and pupilage of more than three years had given the sisters increased confidence in this their "star" pupil, and had said, coolly, "O, Miss Martin, Miss Paton and I are going on an excursion to Boulogne for a week," it would be hardly wonderful to hear the same answer—"Very well, Maude, do not be gone too long."

Such is a brief sketch, which it is hoped may convey to the reader's mind some idea of the young lady for whom we left the sisters Martin waiting in the drawing room.

---

## CHAPTER II.

## A TERRIBLE SCANDAL.

THE door opened, and Maude Luton entered and advanced up to the hearthrug between the two ladies. She did not "glide in" noiselessly, nor did she "sail in," or "bounce in," but simply entered the room in a quiet, unobtrusive way, and with the least possible rustle of her dress, just sufficient to inform any one who was not looking that a lady had entered. She stopped, and said—

"Good afternoon, Miss Martin; good afternoon, Miss Ruth. You wished to see me, I believe?"

"Yes, my dear Maude," said the younger, ever the more warm-hearted and impulsive of the two; "its about your going. We are so very sorry. Have you quite made up your mind?"

"I think it is for the best I should leave," replied Maude; "best for every one concerned. Certainly it will be best for the girl that she sees little of me, and does not come across my path in the world!"

These words were said with sudden, fiery emphasis, as though they had broken through her habitual caution and leapt out unawares. Her voice, as she gave them utterance, underwent a sudden and singular change; from soft and musical, it suddenly became harsh and metallic in its sound, and the words were jerked out rapidly.

For a moment or two there was silence, the two sisters gazing on her in wonder ; she with a slightly heightened colour looking at the reflection of her own fair face in the pier glass, and carelessly tapping the fender with her small foot.

Looking on her, as she thus stood, the afternoon sun filtered through venetians and gauzy curtains wrapping her in a misty light, that she was beautiful there could be no question. Tall and finely shaped, slender, supple, and graceful, her figure seemed cloud-like in its ever varying outline, as she constantly though ever so slightly changed her posture. It seemed as though it were instinct with an easy undulating motion, which forbade perfect immobility even for a second. Her arms were well developed above the elbow ; no trace of scragginess or even thinness below, they tapered to the most delicate little hand and wrist conceivable ; fingers thin but white and delicate, but not by any means too thin or weak. One could see plenty of nervous force in those smooth white hands of Miss Maude's to which the piano could bear witness. Her shoulders were somewhat broad, but perfectly formed, and joining the white neck in the most elegant curve imaginable, the true "line of beauty;" these said shoulders she carried well thrown back, the slender throat swelling upwards to the small antique head, fit pedestal and column for such a crown ; the hollow between her shoulder-blades at the back attested her upright carriage, and as it were, proud bearing physically, but even more than this, it might have betokened. Her bearing seemed to say "thus will I battle with fate, meet misfortune, defeat injustice and conquer." Let it not be supposed for a moment that there

was anything stiff or constrained in her attitude, or that it resulted from either backboard or posture-master. It was innate to her; and at once a grace and a claim to superiority, which was oftentimes granted unquestioned. She wore her rich dark brown hair bound plainly round her head, and confined at the back with a simple crescent-shaped comb. A white collar around her neck was fastened by a small silver anchor, emblem of hope; little white sleeves with silver studs; and plain leather belt with buckle of the same pure white metal. These were all the ornaments Maude Luton wore to relieve the somewhat sombre nature of her dark dress.

The great peculiarity in this young lady's face was her eyes. These were large, expressive, ever changing, but of uncertain colour. Were they blue, grey, or hazel? It were almost impossible to say; and many were the discussions and arguments among her schoolfellows on the point, which, at Laburnum House at least, was never clearly settled.

After a silence of a few moments Maude turned slowly towards Miss Martin, and apparently looked her full in the face with a cool, deliberate stare. Before settling down to this said stare, however, her eyes fluttered about a little, like a bird hesitating to alight.

"For goodness sake, Miss Luton, don't look at me like that!" exclaimed Miss Martin, absolutely shrinking under her pupil's eyes, "you make me shudder."

Maude started. "I beg your pardon," she said; "I was not looking at you, that I am aware of."

"That is just it, my dear Miss Luton," said the lady, more composedly. "You were looking *through* me. You

have no idea what an unpleasant feeling it causes—at least to me.”

“I am really very sorry,” said Maude, with a light laugh. “It is a bad habit into which I have suffered myself to fall. Do you know, I sank insensibly into a day-dream, or reverie—call it what you will; and at such times I see nothing—or at least, nothing distinctly; all seems in a sort of mist or haze.”

And in good truth Maude’s fixed, stony stare, when in one of these reveries of hers, was sufficiently singular to disquiet any person at all inclined to be nervous.

Seemingly staring full in one’s face, her eyes were manifestly vacant and void of intelligent sight. The pupils were dilated and fixed, which enhanced the notion of the cold, hard stare with which she looked right through the apparent object. The fact was, that at such times she saw nothing of the person’s face at whom she seemed to be staring—her eyes were in reality focussed on a point behind—perhaps empty space. Anyhow, she saw nothing clearly, but a dim, confused jumble, which conveyed no idea to the mind; all too wrapt in itself, revelling in far-off scenes long past enacted, or perchance inventing, imagining, building castles in the air. There was something strange, weird-like, unnatural, in so singular a look and expression—more especially when Maude’s youth and great beauty are taken into consideration. Assuredly, had she lived among the wonder-loving peasantry of the sister isle, they would have put down these fits of abstraction, accompanied by the rapt gaze, to the influence of fairies, or other supernatural agency.

Immediately after one of these dreamy fits Maude was

went to waken up to unusual activity, and her large eyes, of uncertain colour, never very steady, would be more restless than usual, flitting butterfly-like from place to place, alighting nowhere.

Surely a remarkable, even extraordinary girl. So felt all who had opportunities of knowing her intimately, although perhaps they were unable to put the thought into definite shape. But to proceed with the thread of our story.

"We have been thinking," put in Miss Ruth Martin, "my sister and I, whether it were not possible to make up this quarrel between you and Miss Clarke."

"Really, Ruth, I have not said anything on the subject. I do not know what the quarrel was about; and until I do it would be absurd and presumptuous on my part to think of making it up. It was to hear from your own lips, Miss Luton," continued the elder, turning to her pupil, "how this young lady has offended you—what, in fact, she has done which has caused you to take so sudden a resolution. I have not had you under my charge for so long a time without watching and noting the formation and development of your character. I will own frankly that I have seen much to admire, and some little to regret. I admire your ability, your application, and your perseverance—your courageous perseverance, in any task undertaken. I admire and respect the spirit of emulation and desire to excel which I see in you. I like, too, the evenness of your character, the self-control you have imposed on your words and actions. Still, I wish that in some things you were a little less determined. Perhaps I am over critical; but were you my daughter, I should love

you all the more if you were occasionally naughty, or peevish, or cross."

"Oh! Madam, do not say so," cried Maude, in feminine emotion. "I have all the world before me. I know not what temptations, what dangers await me. Do not say you wish me weak. Pray with me rather, dear Madam, that I may be strong." A tear started to her eye as she spoke, and the bright flush on her cheek, and her earnest voice, told of her sincerity. Miss Martin herself, given to be hard rather than emotional, melted at this evidence of feeling in her favourite pupil.

"My dear Maude," she said, "perhaps I did you injustice. I hope you will succeed in all you undertake; nay, I am sure you will. I pray you may never engage in anything but that which is good and pure, and worthy of a Christian lady."

"I will never attempt anything mean or unworthy. I will never long for what is not mine, nor envy others. I will never strive for that to which I have no right, but I will try to succeed. I am not without ambition, Miss Martin, and I feel I am capable of better things than living and dying a hired governess. I feel I am fitted for a higher position, and if I can win my way fairly and honourably, I will."

"You are a talented girl, Maude—a brave girl, and a good girl. May you ever remain so; and if ever you are tempted, may Heaven give you strength, is the prayer of your sincere friend. And now, my dear Maude, about this quarrel with Miss Clarke. At present I know nothing about it."

"Madam, I will tell you everything that occurred, and

and leave you to judge how bitterly I felt the insult. You must know that Miss Clarke went to Paris last year with her father, a simple, good sort of man—a large farmer, but with no pretensions to high breeding, or even education. Clara Faversham came to me, saying—‘O do come, Maude dear, into the music-room; Dolly Clarke is relating her Parisian experiences. It is such fun.’ I went with Clara and Lydia Paton, both my dear friends, and listened for some time to Miss Clarke’s narrative. Several girls were listening, and more than one smiled as she went on. I, for one, could not help doing the same when she spoke of the gallery of the *Louvre*, and the *Palace Royal*. She saw me smile, and coloured up, but went on nevertheless; and presently she said something so absurd about what she called the *Tooleris* that I could scarcely forbear laughing. Again unfortunately she saw me. I assure you I had no intention of giving offence, and would not have said a word on any account. But she addressed me quite insolently—‘O! you may laugh and sneer, Miss Luton, with your stuck-up airs. You’ve never been to Paris, so what do you know about it?’ I felt angry at her insolent tone, and replied—‘I have never been to Paris, Miss Clarke, it is true, nor have you, I believe, except for a few days., ‘Yes; but that’s better than not at all, my lady? and if I’ve only been once, my Pa has been five times, and he’s quite a perfect Frenchman.’”

“How intensely vulgar,” exclaimed Miss Ruth. “I could not have conceived such coarse vulgarity possible.”

“Her manner was so insulting, and besides, the idea of her father, a great honest yeoman, being a perfect Frenchman, was so absurd, that I could not help laughing again,



perhaps a little scornfully. I had often seen her father, and the idea in connection with him was in itself intensely ludicrous. Hereupon Miss Clarke started up, and shouted out in a loud voice—

“You dare to laugh at my Pa, you hussy—you—nameless nothing! Who was your father? How is it they call you Luton? Your uncle never had a brother! No! Nor your mother a husband, I believe.”

“The wretch! the infamous slanderer. I could have killed her where she stood,” exclaimed Maude, now white and trembling, with passion at the very memory of the insult.

Miss Martin remained gravely silent, but Miss Ruth spoke up. “Atrocious!” she cried, warmly. “The girl is not only intensely vulgar, but, it seems, malicious and slanderous.”

“My dear Maude,” said the elder, after thinking for a moment or two, “you must excuse my asking the question, but is there any idle story—anything at all in connection with your family, which can give the slightest ground for so gross an imputation?”

“Nothing at all, Madam—nothing I am sure; quite sure!” was the passionate reply; and as the girl spoke, her breast heaved with sobs, and tears stole down her cheeks.

“Do you know your own family history?” persisted Miss Martin—(with needless cruelty Miss Ruth thought.)

“No Madam. My uncle is not a talkative man, nor since childhood have I seen much of him. I know that he was deeply attached to my poor mother. Any allusion to her saddens him, so the subject was always avoided. My cousin David, too, he is five years older

than me, but he never spoke of anything, But I will tell my uncle the insult that has been put on me, and get from him my history, in order that if any one dare to repeat the atrocious falsehood, I may confute them. After another pause Miss Martin asked—"Had your uncle a brother?"

"I don't know," replied Maude, hesitatingly; "I think not,"

"Then I suppose your mother must have married a cousin in some degree, of the same name?"

"I suppose so, Madam; but indeed till now I have never thought on the subject."

"My dear Maude," said the elder Miss Martin, after a still longer pause, "I am very, very sorry to lose you, and still more sorry that a pupil of mine should have disgraced herself as has Miss Clarke. You have quite made up your mind to leave?"

"Quite," was the short, decisive answer.

"You have written to your uncle?"

"I have written to him to send the brougham to meet the morning express, which leaves Paddington to-morrow at 9.15."

"Well, good night, my dear child, and may you be happy. Will you breakfast with me and Ruth alone to-morrow! I should like us to part friends."

Tears of affection and gratitude gushed to the girl's eyes; and pressing a hand of each, she hurried away, needlessly ashamed of her emotion.

"Ruth," said the elder sister, sternly, when they were alone together, "I am very sorry to lose Maude; not only for our own interest's sake, but because I really

loved and was proud of her, as though she had been my own daughter. She is going. But as for that offensive Clarke girl, she shall go too—aye, and that sharply. I will ignominiously expel her, so sure as my name is Jane Martin—

Ruth jumped up from her chair. “Then my dear Jane, if Miss Clarke is to go, there is no earthly reason why dear Maude should not stay.”

“My dear Ruth, you talk without thinking. It is best that Maude should go home and have an explanation with her uncle. To say the least, it is strange that she should know nothing of her father. This Clarke girl comes from the same part of the country, remember, and scandal flies apace. At all events, I must keep even the suspicion of scandal from Laburnum House. Ring the bell, and we will have Miss Dorothy Clarke up.

This young lady appeared, in a state of considerable fluster. All the school was excited and restless. The girls talked to each other in low tones about the affair of yesterday, and even those who perhaps envied the handsome and talented Maude her pre-eminence just a little agreed that the conduct of Miss Clarke was vulgar, and utterly inexcusable. So that spiteful young lady found herself met on all sides with looks of aversion and contempt—ostracised, or as the boys would say, “sent to Coventry.” She was passionate, wilful, and quite unaccustomed to control her passions, but at bottom not bad-hearted, and now looked back with dismay on her doing. At the first few harsh-toned words Miss Martin addressed to her, she burst into tears.

“I am very sorry, Ma'am, I said so much as I did; but

she laughed at my Pa; and its true, at least so people say our way."

"And if it were doubly true it reflects none the less disgrace, infamy I will say, on you. You call yourself a young lady, to throw such a cruel taunt in the face of another publicly? Shame on you! if you have any shame in your shameless nature."

Sobs and tears were her only reply; so the mistress, finding it hopeless to learn anything from her, dismissed her. "You can now go. I shall have more to say to you to-morrow morning, after Miss Luton has left. Remember, she leaves honourably, of her own free will; loved, respected, looked up to by all."

These words to her, involving mysterious penalties in store, brought fresh tears and lamentations from the now thoroughly repentant Miss Dorothy Clarke.

Maude was up betimes on the following morning; and by eight o'clock her boxes were all packed and taken down to the hall, ready to be put on the cab which was coming at a quarter to nine to take her to Paddington. After a hurried breakfast, alone in the little parlour with the sisters Martin, she ran up stairs, put on her bonnet, and cloak, and then came down to the schoolroom to bid farewell to her fellow pupils. With all she shook hands warmly; some, her more intimate friends, she kissed, and almost shed tears, as she bade adieu. No, not with all did she shake hands, for she studiously avoided Miss Clarke, who, crimson with shame and embarrassment, pretended to be intent on a book.

"Good bye dear—good bye, darling—so sorry you are going—do write soon."

These and such like were the parting words which fell on her ear. The farewell with Lydia Paton and Clara Faversham was of a warmer nature. Maude had to promise to visit each of the girls next vacation, was well-nigh overwhelmed with kisses, tears, and embraces, but at last made her way to the door and out into the hall. Just as she was about passing out, having bestowed and received the last kiss, Miss Dorothy Clarke stepped forward, and holding out her hand, faltered out some scarcely intelligible words. Her face was flushed—her eyes were red with weeping; and she looked really sorry.

Probably there are few girls who, under like circumstances, seeing all around them the evidences of confusion and grief by themselves created, would not have felt grieved and self-abased at their own isolation and ill odour. Possibly it was as much a feeling of selfish regret, at the unpleasant position in which she had placed herself, as genuine remorse and sorrow for the mischief she had wrought, which influenced the culprit. Let us, however, take a charitable view, grant her repentance to be real and, relate what followed her attempt at atonement, and, in some sort, reconciliation.

Maude saw her, and paused for a moment on the threshold of the door. Though cloaked and bonneted, no veil over her face to hide the play and expression of the features. She carried a shawl over her left arm, but the other was free—free to take, if she had so chosen, the proffered hand of Miss Dorothy Clarke. Maude's large strange eyes fixed themselves on the offender's face for a moment, any one might have fancied she was going off into one of her reveries—so cold, hard, and fixed was her look.

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But quickly the colour flashed to her cheek, angry flames lighted up the fine eyes; her brow was knit, her frame trembled just a little. Then, from between her clenched teeth there came bitterly, shortly, sharply, and angrily, the words—

“You—vulgar—reptile! Stand out of my path!”

At the same moment she with her right hand angrily dashed on one side the proffered hand of Miss Clarke; and sweeping her for one instant with a look of concentrated contempt and hate, she passed slowly out and entered the cab.

There was a strange quiet after Maude had driven off, in Laburnum House. Every one seemed to know and feel that one more than ordinary had gone from among them. Maude's talents and superiority had been silently acknowledged and acquiesced in, even by those who chafed a little that a fellow pupil, one without wealth or rank to recommend her, should carry such queenly sway. But while she had been among them she had given no possible cause of offence to any, excepting the homage which many were glad to pay her, quietly and as a right, but not troubling herself about those who chose to stand on their dignity and hold aloof. These, however, in due time felt themselves forced to succumb to the inevitable, or find themselves in the position of a small and unnoticed minority.

Now that Maude Luton was gone it seemed as though a blight had fallen on the inmates of Laburnum House. They knew not until they had lost her how potent was the  
• sway she had wielded—how great the influence of her presence and example. The girls looked back on her many graces and talents; her willingness to oblige even the

humblest in her own proud, queenly way; her unselfishness and good temper; these and many other good traits now forced themselves on their memory. Last though not least, they were all so proud of her, it seemed as though the principal chandelier in a large room had been removed now that she was absent.

Lydia Paton and Clara Faversham talked sadly together over their lost friend. The other girls gathered together in groups; and of course Maude Luton was the theme of their discourse. Dolly Clarke, the unfortunate and thoroughly wretched cause of all this to-do, was shunned, loathed, despised, and shrinking from observation felt as miserable as she deserved to be. But she had yet more to endure, and before this was over she had further reason to regret her own foolish and vulgar speech, by which she had made herself obnoxious to all—a bitter enemy in Maude Luton.

The girls were summoned into the schoolroom, and when all had taken their places, Miss Martin addressed them, in a cold, hard tone, which every one knew meant she was seriously angry. It was not difficult to guess who was the culprit on whom her anger was to be vented, for immediately on entering the room, her keen eye had singled out Miss Clarke.

"Young ladies," she said, "you have just parted with a fellow pupil whose abilities and excellencies would do honour to any establishment. The highest tribute I can pay to the name of Maude Luton is to bid you follow her example. I have now to deal with another of your number. Miss Clarke, be kind enough to come forward."

Unhappy Dolly Clarke had to march from her seat up

through the centre of the room to the large writing table at the window, where sat the sisters Martin. Her fair complexioned, freckled face was crimson to the very roots of her bright auburn (almost red) hair. She was not a bad looking girl; and but that her eyes were small, her forehead too low, and her figure by no means of the most elegant type, she might even have been called handsome. Plenty of people considered her a pretty girl; and doubtless as she grew up her figure would improve. Her features were good—nose straight, mouth passable, a round and by no means ill-shaped head; she had a profusion of very bright auburn hair, which really was as nearly red as possible. Her skin was very fair, but also much freckled, nevertheless, there is no doubt that when a few years have passed over, and Miss Dolly Clarke shall have passed from girlhood to maidenhood, she will not want admirers. Frequently these awkward, ungainly school-girl frames fill out and blossom into the well-developed figures of handsome women.

At the present moment poor Dolly Clarke is in a sad plight. Her eyes are cast down; but she knows that from all sides unfriendly, unpitying, glances are cast upon her.

*This* is not what she expected when her indulgent father yielded to her oft repeated request to send her to a fashionable school. Dolly was sixteen, ambitious of seeing the world, and of mixing in better society than that of farmer's and grazier's wives, sister's and daughters. But she was shrewd, and sensible of her own shortcomings. She knew that she had not received an elegant education. Indeed to say truth, she had not even received the rudiments of a good sound one. Strange if she had in her father's



farm house, where she was absolute mistress, and could and did laugh at the plain English governess engaged at twenty-five pounds a year to impart education to herself and younger sisters. She was vain and garrulous ; hence, though she must have known, or ought to have known, that her French could not possibly be pure, she would chatter on, and finally committed the great and unpardonable error of first taking offence at the quiet smile on the face of Maude, and then grossly insulting her.

She stood before the two sisters, and raising her eyes now for the first time, found that both were sternly regarding her.

"Miss Clark," said the elder lady, "I do not know whether you have anything to say in explanation or palliation of your gross misconduct and insulting language to Miss Luton ? She was silent.

"You do not answer. Of course you can give no explanation. I can only see one way of accounting for such, conduct, and that is on the theory of insanity. Now, Miss Clarke, as this establishment is not a lunatic asylum but a young ladies' school, it is obviously no fit place for you. I have written to your father to take you away at once, declining any longer to continue you as my pupil. Until you leave here, you will take your meals alone, and," turning to the assembled school, "young ladies all, I desire that you will none of you hold any conversation with Miss Clarke, whom I have decided on expelling from the school."

Dolly Clark said never a word ; but her heart was brimful with shame, sorrow, and bitter mortification. She had scarcely been at Laburnum House a month, and

now, after all the trouble she had to persuade her fond papa to send her, she was to be expelled—sent back in disgrace. She said never a word, but walked up to her room in sullen silence.

“And I offered her my hand, and would willingly have apologised and begged pardon of this proud Luton girl. She threw me off—spurned me as though I had been a dog; and now through her I am to be expelled, driven home in disgrace. Oh! but I will be revenged on you yet, Miss Maude Luton!”

Strange to say at that very time, while being whirled across pleasant Berkshire meadows by the iron horse of the Great Western Railway, somewhat similar thoughts were passing through Maude Luton's mind. She was brooding over the insult she had received, and her blood boiled and tingled in her veins as she recalled the words. Her thoughts shaped themselves very much in this fashion, as she clenched her small hands—

“Oh! but I will be revenged on you yet, Miss Dolly Clarke!”

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## CHAPTER III.

## DAY DREAMS AND A PROPHECY.

MAUDE LUTON's thoughts, as she was being whirled along to her uncle's home in beautiful Gloucestershire, were not by any means kindly or christianlike; but they were in accordance with her nature. This nature or disposition, she had never attempted to cultivate, train, prune, or curb. On the culture of her mind she bestowed much thought and pains; but accepted her disposition as it was, nor sought to analyse it, criticise it, least of all improve it. She was generous, but revengeful; affectionate, yet both passionate and unforgiving, by nature. Few knew her disposition better than did the eldest Miss Martin, who had watched her with wondering curiosity.

Said this lady to her sister, when they were alone together after the departure of Maude—

“Ruth, did you see her look when Miss Clarke offered her hand? Heard you her words? Marked you the scorn with which she flung away the proffered hand, the contemptuous glance with which she swept her figure? I marked it all, and grieved. Ah! Ruth, Maude is a girl of great beauty, rare talents and attainments, indomitable will and perseverance, of affectionate heart; but behind and beyond all, there is a wild, passionate nature, strong feelings and passions—a nature capable of nourishing hatred and exacting vengeance for an injury; a nature which would

impel her to make any sacrifice to attain what she might consider a just end—aye, I had almost said, to use *any* means. Ruth, I tell you that there is a marvellous wealth of power as well as talent in that girl. I do not think she is likely to go jog-trot through the world. I do not think she will live and die in obscurity. She will be heard of, Ruth—she will be heard of, that girl. She has the stuff in her which makes heroines and martyrs—and she-demons too.” She paused for a moment and then said, abruptly, “Ruth, I should be very sorry to be Dolly Clarke.”

“Why?” asked her sister, who had never heard her speak her mind so openly and in so strange a manner before.

“Because I should have Maude Luton for my enemy,” was the short answer.

Miss Martin, after this expression of opinion, grew taciturn, and would say no more; and as for the present we have done with the two amiable sisters and Laburnum House, we will leave them and return to Maude—who, at this period of our story at least, being the prominent character, we may call our heroine.

Her spirits rose as the express train, whirled her away from the station, past the engine-sheds and workshops, past the suburban brick maze of Paddington, past Ealing and Hanwell, and away from metropolitan Middlesex into the fields and pastures of Berkshire. As the fair spring landscape unfolded before her, the dark discontented thoughts which fluttered in her mind partially disappeared. She opened the window, and leaning back against the padded cushions of the first-class carriage, let the wind blow on her face, The fresh morning breeze, the bright sunshine, the

sense of rapid motion, and perhaps also the knowledge that she had left school, all aided to dissipate the unpleasant thoughts conjured up by the memory of Dolly Clarke's hateful words. So she gave up thinking of the past, and turned her imagination loose in the immense fields of the future.

She was the sole occupant of the carriage, so could freely indulge a very bad habit she had fallen into, that is to say, talking aloud to herself. Presently, speeding along at fifty miles an hour, she espied on a hill, royal Windsor Castle, with the royal standard floating right royally from the flag-staff on the tower. Then flew her thoughts to the olden days when England's kings held gorgeous court. She conjured up from the distant past the shadowy form of yellow-haired Elizabeth, the virgin queen; and thought, that were she queen, she would rule in the same royal, queenly way; and yet perhaps, who could tell, she might meet one to whom, in virtue of her womanhood, she would be forced to abnegate her queenship in favour of—one whom courtiers might call her subject, but her own heart and nature owned as lord. Then her fancy flew to the days of "Bluff King Hal," Defender of the Faith and unscrupulous wife-remover, by axe, or Pope's Bull—anyhow, so that the end were gained, and the amorous tyrant king again for a brief space a free man. Then back to Windsor, the "merrie wives" thereof; "sweet Ann Page," and pot-valiant Sir John Falstaff. Next she charmed up before her mind's eye the ghostly, antlered rider, bullet and sword proof, Herne the Hunter.

Then with a shrill scream, the train dashed through Slough station and her eyes caught a passing glimpse of

some of the queen's carriages waiting for the next train. Then with a swoop her thoughts flew from the heroic, mystic, romantic past, to the *present*. She thought of the court of Victoria; the old aristocracy of rank, and the new aristocracy of wealth, pressing around the throne. On this theme she dwelt long—pictured herself presented at court—drew a mental image of herself in gorgeous array, with jewels and costly robes, standing proudly in her beauty amongst the noblest ladies of Britain. For be it known, Maude Luton was well aware she possessed beauty, and though not vain, was by no means insensible of the advantages the dangerous gift conferred on her. She could not help knowing it, indeed her glass told it her every time she looked in it; and had there been no such thing as a mirror in the world, she would still have known it—for did not every one tell her so? Some spoke of it with a little envy at heart, others with pure pride and affection; but all acknowledged the fact that Maude Luton was beautiful. She dreamed on in that delightful manner which only falls to the share of the young and enthusiastic, who have not yet had the romance and poetry rubbed off them by contact with the hard, grubbing wordlings of this our planet.

Her dreams and castle-buildings, and fanciful extravagant foreshadowings of her own future, were put a stop to by the arrival of the train at Reading. She was thirsty; so, after inquiring of the guard whether there was time enough, alighted from the carriage, and proceeding to the counter of the refreshment-room, asked for a cup of coffee. This, after some little delay, was handed to her; and she had just managed to drink half, and scald her throat to

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boot, when the bell rang, and she was forced to hurry back to the train. Her carriage was next to the engine. On entering it, she found a stranger there who had installed himself in the seat she had previously occupied. She looked at him just for one moment, and was about to take her seat at the other window, when the gentleman rose, and politely addressed her—

"I beg ten thousand pardons. Have I your seat? I fancy so, for I see you have your shawl and bag opposite. How stupid of me not to notice it before. Pray allow me to re-install you!"

His voice was pleasant—his manner respectful. A very brief glance, and her instincts told her he was a gentleman; so with a pleasant smile, Maude took her former seat. Of course she could not boldly scrutinise her companion in the carriage, but she was enabled to get a general idea of his face and figure by a few quickly stolen glances. A rather tall, well-made young man he seemed, she thought, about five or six-and-twenty, with good, regular features; a bright smile, small whiskers brown like the hair, and moustache lighter—a tawny colour in fact; dark blue eyes, bright and keen; a pleasing expression, and complexion which might once have been fair, but was now tanned by wind, weather, and rain, to a very dark hue indeed. His hands were small, and though, like the face, evidently bronzed by exposure, they were well kept, and the nails carefully trimmed. He was attired in a light grey suit, all from the same piece of cloth apparently. A plain black hair chain, which was probably attached to a watch in the waistcoat pocket, and a signet-ring on the little finger of the right hand—these were the only articles in the way of ornament he wore. All this

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Maude's sharp eyes noted, without his observing that she bestowed a glance upon him—at least, so she flattered herself.

When the train began to move, the stranger handed her "Punch" to look at. She took it, smiled, thanked him, and proceeded to look at the pictures. First, she carefully inspected the large cartoon, usually a political one. She had not the most remote idea of the point, or even meaning of this, but had no intention of confessing as much; she scanned it carefully, and then turned to the social sketch by that prince of limners of English scenes, especially in regard to young ladies and horses—John Leech. In a very short time they lapsed insensibly into a general conversation, these two. He asked if she was travelling down the main line, and she not understanding, asked for an explanation. This he readily gave. There was a junction a little farther on, at Didcot, he said; the main line went on down to the western counties—Bristol, Bath, Exeter, and Plymouth, while a branch shot out to Oxford, Worcester, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and on to Liverpool.

"Oh, thank you! Now I understand. Yes; I am going down the main line, to a station called Cumberford Road, in Gloucestershire."

His eyes brightened with intelligence, and he checked himself on the point of speaking. Then he was silent, and pulling out a letter from his breast pocket, read it. When he had finished, he looked up, and absolutely started. She, this strange young lady, was staring him full in the face. At least he thought so; but the truth was that Maude, when he ceased talking, sank into one of her reveries, and her eyes, though directed full on him, saw him not, but



were focussed on vacancy—a point on the other side of the cushion behind him. He coloured, looked away, and after half a minute or so, felt his eyes drawn back again. Astonishing! She was still staring hard at him. As he regarded her, in blank dismay and confusion; and just as he was again about turning away, she seemed to awake with a start, and was suddenly conscious of her apparent rudeness.

“I beg your pardon,” she said, blushing, but quite self-composed. “I fear you thought I was rudely staring at you. It was not so, indeed. I have an abominable habit of falling into a dream-like state of thought, and at such times I usually look straight ahead, apparent staring at any one who may be opposite, but in reality seeing nothing. I really must break myself of it; it is not only humiliating to myself, but annoying to others. I am sure you will pardon me?”

Pardon her, of course—that is to say, he had nothing to pardon, he said; and gallantly added, that he was willing she should so offend as long as she pleased, if she would guarantee her bright glances should not quite consume him. The words were ordinary enough in their nature; but she thought she detected a covert sarcasm in the tone, as though he said to himself—

“See what a fool I am, flattering this girl, and paying her silly compliments; and how much greater a fool is she who swallows them.”

Somehow she could not but feel a strange interest in her new acquaintance; and she was aware too, presently as it were instinctively, that he took every opportunity of covertly scrutinising her. Not admiringly, however,

but, she fancied, with *curiosity*—as he might examine a strange species of bird with beautiful plumage. He was very cautious, however, and for some time did not suffer her to catch his eyes fixed on her face. At last however, she caught him by a ruse; he coloured up, so did she, and then both burst out laughing. Heaven knows what possessed them, but so it was.

“Well now,” said Maude, who was first to regain her composure, “what do you think of me? I know you have been thinking of me, and wondering and puzzling your head for some time. I know there is something singular in my manner. I have been told so before. I suppose it is rather bold of me talking to you in this manner, but really I cannot help it.”

“You ask me a straight forward question,” he replied “I will give you a straightforward answer. I really don’t know what to make of you. I am at fault.”

“Are you a physiognomist?”

“Well, yes, in a measure. I am fond of forming judgments of people at first acquaintance. Do you know, I am very seldom wrong.”

“Ah! now you tantalize me. You say you are always right in your first impression, and yet you won’t let me prove your words by telling me what you think of myself. Am I an actress—a milliner—a governess—a singer—a tradesman’s daughter—a lord’s wife—or what? Come, sir Oracle, speak!”

“Oh, you misunderstand me. It was of character—of disposition, I was speaking. As to the other, I know you are a lady—that is sufficiently evident.”

“Thank you,” she said, saucily, bowing and laughing,

"I did not ask you for a compliment. But my character—disposition! Quick! Let me have it, or I shall think you an impostor—a charlatan."

"I really cannot help it. I cannot make you out. You are like a cipher, without the key. Your eyes puzzle me."

"My eyes."

"Yes; I never saw eyes like them. I place most dependance on the eyes when I form my judgment and take my first impression,"

"Why, what is the matter with my eyes? they are not red, are they? I think I did cry just a little bit this morning before I left schoo—" she stopped herself, and thought he had not caught the word; but she was mistaken.

"There is nothing the matter with your eyes. They are very beautiful ones, and not at all red, I assure you but I can't make out their expression. They are ever changing—varying, even in colour; and their restless wandering, will-o'-the-wisp eyes—eyes like those with which Vivien bewitched and befooled poor old Merlin, and cajoled him out of the secret of the charm."

"Ah! it is all very well to compare me to Vivien, and laugh it off so; but I don't believe a bit in your boasted power of divination and first-sight judgment."

"Didcot! Didcot junction! Change here for Oxford and Birmingham line! Didcot!—Didcot!"

Whilst they had been talking, the express train had run into Didcot Station. Here the strange gentleman was to change carriages, so he gathered up his railway rug and hat-box, and bidding her a polite adieu, stepped out on the platform.

"Good-bye, Sir Wizard," she said smiling. "A pleasant journey to you."

"And you don't believe in my prophetic power? Shall I give you a proof?"

"Yes, if you please!" she cried, with childish eagerness.

"Well; we shall meet again."

"Bah! That is a very general kind of prophecy."

"Well, then; since you will not be content with that, shall I tell you something about yourself; whence you have come—whither you are going?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried gleefully. "Do, if you can, I defy you!"

He smiled, and leaning on the edge of the window, said.—"You have just left a ladies' school at Kensington, and are going to Cumberford Road Station, where your uncle will have sent to meet you, for he expects you, having had a letter from you yesterday saying you were coming. Good-bye, and a pleasant journey. Remember, I have prophesied we shall meet again." He was gone.

Maude for a moment or two felt absolutely frightened, and for some little time could not collect her thoughts. Even when she did think quietly over what occurred, as the train rattled on down the line, she was as much at a loss as ever. Maude was not exactly superstitious, but she had a mind well-disposed to revere the marvellous, and not disposed to reject entirely the supernatural. Her first thoughts, then, and one which clung to her with great pertinacity, was, that this stranger was indeed possessed of some singular power by which he could read the past and the future. Had he not done so, in fact?

Had he not told her whence she had come?—that was of the past; and whither she was going?—that was of the future. Moreover, he had wound up with a prophecy, and Maude felt nervously anxious to know whether it would be fulfilled or not. And if it were fulfilled, when and where would they meet again—she and this strange, good-looking gentlemanly wizard? Presently, as the train swept her onward to her destination, a revulsion of feeling came over her—the high spirits sank slowly away, the glitter faded from her eye, the colour from her cheek. There came over her face a hard, pained expression; the lips, awhile back wreathed in smiles, were compressed, thin, and bloodless; the eyes—those singular eyes—seemed to contract, and in lieu of beams of laughing light, there seemed to dart from them cold, steel-like gleams. Again she was brooding over the hated words of Dolly Clarke. She was again alone; so indulged freely in her habit of soliloquizing.

“I will know all about this—about myself, my history, and my mother and father. No one shall ever taunt me again, and find me powerless to refute the slander; I will ask my uncle—will insist in his confiding to me our family history. He cannot, he will not refuse. He was always kind, though taciturn; but I am no longer a child; it is fitting that I should know. Surely—O no, it *cannot* be; there can be no shadow of truth or foundation in that horrid girl’s words. No, no, no; away, dreadful thought—base, wicked, malicious lie! O but she shall suffer for it, if ever I have the power, the spiteful viper! Now let me see. My plan of action is clear; I must talk to my uncle privately, and entreat, nay, insist if necessary, that he tells me enough of my history to enable me to

silence at once any such lying slander as that of Dolly Clarke, if ever one should arise. Then I must determine on my future course of action. I am to be a governess ; that is decided, because I have not sufficient means to live as a lady, and the profession of governess is almost the only one open, unless indeed my musical and vocal powers and ability should turn out to be of a very high grade. I think I may hope great things of my voice. Our singing-master, Signor Torriato, though he does not say much, I *know* thinks very highly of my singing. I have noticed him listen with rapt attention when I have been trying my higher notes. He has never once told me that I overstrained myself, or that I was not quite equal to what I attempted. He said to Miss Martin that my voice was a perfect, pure soprano, of great compass and power, capable of almost anything. Now, I know that a pure, good soprano voice is not often met with. Yes, on the whole I have great hopes of my voice. And besides I am so fond of music. Ah ! it would be delightful to reap honour, wealth, consideration, in so pleasant a manner. A few bars ! Then thunders of applause, showers of bouquets, cataracts of sovereigns."

She gave herself up for some little time to the delightful dream. Be it observed, though she soliloquized aloud when her thoughts were of a practical order, she never talked when she lapsed into her fairy dream-land. The sound of her own voice would have broken the spell. No ; when Maude commenced building her castles in the air, fantastic, elegant, fairy structures of white marble, with gilded battlements, and everything with which her fertile imagination could deck them, her brain creations, she

was uniformly silent, and merged into that intent, trance like state, with its steady stare into vacancy, which had so charmed Miss Martin, and startled the stranger—the wizard.

In the midst of one of these visions, she found herself at Cumberford Station, where her uncle's little brougham awaited her. Her luggage having been placed outside, she entered, and was driven off to Cumberford, a distance of some five miles. Her thoughts now flew back to the stranger who had so confidently prophesied they would meet again.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she exclaimed. It's all nonsense. Of course he is only an imposter."

But then there suddenly started up in her mind the thought, "But how could he have possibly known that I was going to my uncle at Cumberford? How could he know that I had an uncle? And how could he know that I had come from a school at Kensington? It certainly is quite marvellous, and I feel almost afraid. Ah, well; I wonder whether we shall ever meet again."

Just as she got thus far in her cogitations, the brougham stopped at her uncle's house in quiet Cumberford.

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## CHAPTER IV.

## AN INVITATION TO CUMBERFORD.

THE stranger who astonished and half alarmed Maude by telling her whence she came, and whither she was going, said also that they would meet again. Now, the young lady felt pretty confident, she scarce knew why, that they *would* meet again, and indeed spent some little time in wondering when, where, and under what circumstances the meeting would take place.

Now, sure we are, that the reader of these pages also feels quite confident that the strange prophet and our heroine Maude Luton are to meet again. Else why, the reader may fairly ask, introduce him at all? Why make him puzzle himself over Maude's eyes and finally prophesy they should meet again? Of course they will meet again; and as these dubious prophecies never convey any doubt whatever in romances, we may as well at once confess that they *are* to meet again. Moreover there is no valid reason why the reader of these pages should be kept in the dark as to who the gentleman is. Nor do we see why we should not reveal how he became possessed of the information which enabled him so to startle the unbelieving young lady.

To commence then. His name is Sydney John Davenport, the third son of a Somersetshire gentleman having an entailed estate in that beautiful county. He found it necessary to choose a profession. For, as we have just



said, the estate being strictly entailed on the eldest son, there was very little left for the younger scions of the Davenports. The second son went into the army, and Sydney, who had always a taste for scientific pursuits, decided on the medical profession. Before he was fifteen he was sent to an eminent practitioner in the suburbs of London, one Mr. Maskeleyne, who, besides being a surgeon at St. George's Hospital, had an extensive and lucrative private practice. Mr. Maskeleyne, being a surgeon—he scorned to be called “doctor,”—had four pupils, or apprentices as they legally are, besides Sydney. To two of these we shall shortly introduce the reader. One was David Luton, son of Dr. Luton, of Cumberford, and cousin to Maude; the other Mr. Thomas Hopton, or, as he was always known and called, Tom Hopton. Sydney Davenport duly went to the hospital, attended his lectures, and passed his examinations without the least difficulty, to the intense wonder and envy of Tom Hopton, who went up and was ploughed five times before he finally blundered through. Shortly after Sydney had duly qualified himself, and while he was away on a voyage to India and Australia as ship's surgeon, it fell out that his elder brother received a bad fall in the hunting field, from which he subsequently died. Ere Sydney reached home, news had also arrived that his second brother, a lieutenant in the 42nd foot, had been killed in the Crimea at the battle of Inkerman. Thus on his arrival in England he found himself brotherless, and the heir to a good estate.

His father's health was rapidly failing; and in the ordinary course of nature Sydney would ere long be a rich

man—richer than ever it could have been thought any of his family would have been, for on a small estate in Breconshire, in South Wales, a coal-field was discovered. Previous to that it had been worth at the outside £5,000; now it was worth £150,000; and the royalty, suppose the owners did not choose to work it themselves, would bring in more than the former value annually. Sydney at once took the management of his father's affairs at his request, and accepted an allowance of £2,000 a year during the old man's life—a by no means extravagant stipend, when it is considered that he had the entire control and management of all the property, which brought in an income of at least £8,000 a year.

Sydney Davenport was not intoxicated by his sudden accession to wealth; nor did he forget old friends. A bachelor, six-and-twenty years of age, with ample funds, good health and spirits, it would have been strange indeed had he not enjoyed life. He was fond of pleasure and active exercise of all kinds. Hunting, shooting, cricket, boating, and last, though not least, fishing, occupied his leisure time in the country. In town he led a life, not vicious, but by no means that of a recluse. He had a strong will, and such principles as he held he implicitly acted up to. His notions on many matters were somewhat loose—not loose, be it understood, for a man about town, but shockingly loose for the model hero of a novel. The “Heir of Redclyffe,” and faultless monsters of his school, would probably have fainted at some of Sydney Davenport's free and easy opinions, expressed with blunt frankness, and without fabrication or diguise. But he was not a bad man; quite the reverse. He was strictly honour-

able—looked on his word as his bond. Brave, generous, and kind-hearted, his hand and purse were always ready to assist a friend or even a stranger in misfortune, if deserving. He was impulsive, but had acquired a habit of restraining his speech and actions, though he could not his thoughts.

When a medical student, he had led a free and easy, jovial life, no better and no worse than the majority of young men left to their own resources, away from home influences, in a great city. But he had always lived as a gentleman, in respectable, even handsome apartments; had always dressed well, paid his bills, and not exceeded the liberal allowance he had from his father. When he had passed the college, and took a ship appointment for the purpose of seeing the world, it was the same on board; he attended strictly to his duty, but that done, he considered himself at liberty to enjoy himself; and so he did, especially in foreign parts, and when, there being no passengers on board, there was nothing for the doctor to do.

The death of his brothers placed him at once in a very different position. He might, had he been so disposed, have plunged into the most reckless extravagance, with or without his father's sanction and assistance, for the heir to so fine an estate could of course borrow to almost any amount. But Sydney Davenport had no intention of committing any such folly. He could afford chambers in London, and to keep a groom and valet (in one) to attend to his horse and do his bidding. He could keep his two hunters, hack, and dog-cart in the country; could well afford a month's grouse shooting in Scotland; and was

content for the rest to fill up his time with partridges and pheasants about home. Whenever there was a frost he would run up to London, where he was never at a loss for amusement and excitement. In summer there was cricket, of which he was very fond, boating, and above all, fishing. Give Sydney Davenport a rod, line, and flies, and a good trout stream, and he would make himself perfectly happy on thirty-shillings a week in a country inn.

He was fond of women, of their society in general, but he preferred them young and handsome. There was as to his opinions and conduct to the softer sex a good deal of the Mussulman in him. Not, of course, that he believed women were mere soulless toys for man's amusement—he did not go near so far as that. But though he was a great admirer of beauty, was even warmly susceptible of female charms, which he admired, he yet had some sort of—well, contempt is too strong a word—he undervalued, and looked pityingly on the beautiful being to whose charms of person he was not indifferent. He had a keen eye for the beautiful, and in a crowded room he seldom failed to seek out the most beautiful girl. Sometimes he would watch her at a distance, and compare her with others whose beauty had struck him; at another time he would seek an introduction, or perhaps (it all depended upon the society he was in) would take a shorter mode of making an acquaintance. Let it be understood, however, that Sydney Davenport was quite incapable of deceiving a girl, pretending to love her when he did not, much more was he incapable of deeper wrong.

This was matter, not of religion, or moral feeling even,

but of principle founded on natural kindness of heart. Sydney Davenport held that it was unjust and cruel to injure a girl—to ruin her for life—merely for one's own selfish passion. Farther than this his moral notions did not go.

At the time when he met Maude Luton he was going down to Oxford, there to play a match with eleven of the County of Somerset against eleven of Oriel College. Sydney belonged to half-a-dozen cricket clubs, was a fine player, and never missed a chance of the healthful excitement of a match.

Long after he had left Didcot behind him, and was speeding on to Oxford's ancient city the image of the girl with whom he had just parted was present to him.

"By Jove!" he said—"a handsome girl—a very handsome girl! There's something very extraordinary in that girl. I can't make her out at all. Those eyes of hers. I never saw eyes like them in my life—with such a strange, fluttering, changing expression. Yes; I remember. I have a dim vision of eyes like them. When was it? Where was it?"

He thought for a moment or two: and then suddenly exclaimed to himself. "Ah! I have it now. Miss Batten—poor Edith Batten. Her eyes had just such an expression. But, surely——No, no; I will not think of it?"

There upon he grew suddenly grave; and then, to cheat himself into the belief that he was quite careless, indifferent, and light-hearted, he began to whistle; then he looked out of the window; and this not succeeding, he lit a cigar, in defiance of the company's bye-laws.

Now, this Miss Batten was a young lady passenger on

board the ship "Seringapatam," from London to Calcutta on board which he was surgeon. From the time they entered the tropics he had noticed a wildness in her look and manner; and questioning her aunt, who was convoying herself and sister, he learned that her grandmother had died insane, and also an aunt. Alas! there was soon no doubt about the fact; and ere they were off the Cape, Edith Batten had completely lost her reason.

One day, watching her opportunity, she threw herself overboard; and a gale of wind blowing at the time, she was lost.

Strange that his late travelling companion's eyes should have reminded him of this unfortunate young lady. The memory was a very unpleasant one; the more so as it connected another with the unhappy maniac. However, he tried to laugh it off and make light of it. There was certainly no trace of madness in Maude's manner; on the contrary, she seemed to have all her wits about her.

"What a very singular chance that I should know her," he said to himself: for of course I cannot be mistaken—it must be Maude Luton of whom little Tom Hopton speaks in his letter.

Hereupon he began to read the letter which he had received the preceding evening. As this letter will throw a light on the mystery of his recognising Maude, we will give it:—

"Cumberford, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR OLD SYD.—I write to know if you can come down next week, and if not then when you can. I have got a roach place baited, and no doubt you will have some capital fishing. It is a long time since you have given us a turn down here. I think it is quite time, if you have not grown proud with your prosperity. David is much as usual, working away like a monkish student of the olden time. Talk

about burning 'the midnight oil.' He can't do that, because we use candles ; but I'll wager Mr. David's studies cause a considerable addition in the grocer's Christmas bill for candles. I never knew such a fellow for study ; he must be nearly full by this time, I should think. The doctor is well, and just the same as ever. He says he will be very glad to see you. But now I will tell you some news. First, we are going to have a young lady in the house, the governor's niece, Maude Luton. I have only seen her once, and that was a long time ago ; but I believe she is a very beautiful girl, and highly accomplished. There's a piano here. I expect she'll be kicking up a jolly row on it when she comes home. David says she is a brown, plain little thing, but he hasn't seen her for years. She's been at school, it seems ; and when she's been at home, he's been away and *vice versa*. But I don't pay the least attention to what he says. I know the girl's good-looking ; the governor said so, and he's seen her lately. I shall make awfully strong love to her, I know that. It seems she had a row or a quarrel or something at the Kensington school where she was, and wrote right off to say she was coming home, quite imperiously, and fixing the time and everything in the coolest way. It made me think what a jolly licking I should have got when I was at school if I had done the same. And now for the other piece of news. There is a good trout stream at Fairford in this county, only about eleven miles from us—a very pretty place, and lots of fish. Now, I know a farmer there, it's in our district, and I've been seeing one of his girls through the chicken pox. And wasn't she grateful ! She wasn't scarred that's all—a red-haired great girl of thirteen and not a bit good-looking. Don't like plain girls—wonder what they were made for.

" Well, to go on ; this old fellow—he's not a bad sort I can tell you—has the right of fishing for nearly three miles of water. Well, he's willing to take a fellow in, like you for instance, board him and lodge him, and give him the use of a dog-cart and fast-trotting mare, all for £4 4s. a week, including fishing. Now, if that is not cheap, and the very thing for you, I should like to know what is ! Besides, it would be so nice and convenient to be near our place. You could drive over in an hour and a quarter ; and then you know when you are tired of trout-fishing you could have a turn at my roach," (at this Sydney Davenport who had smiled several times, laughed outright.) " Write and let me know what you are going to do. If you come bring some pater-nosters for perch, and some fine gut for roach ; we can't get any about here. Goodbye, old boy, Yours truly,

TOM HOPTON.

This was the letter from which Sydney Davenport had come to the conclusion that his lively fellow-passenger in the train was Maude Luton. The reader must please remember what Maude had forgotten that she *herself* had told him she was going to Cumberford Road Station. This with the letter, was quite enough to induce Sydney to hazard a guess, which her instant and extreme dismay and astonishment proclaimed to be a correct one. Thus this mystery is easily solved; and as to the prophecy that they would meet again, it was a very safe one, for he intended shortly to visit Cumberford, in accordance with Tom Hoptons invitation, which was given, be it understood, in the name of Dr. Luton and David.

Arrived at Oxford, Davenport put the letter in his pocket, gathered his luggage together, drove in a cab to the Mitre, and then sallied out to the cricket ground, where the cog-tending elevens were to meet. But all through the beautiful, but could not get rid of the apparition of the beautiful coloured eyes. strange, ever changing, fluttering, and once, seeing it in the Maude Luton's face he was jumping up for a catch he missed it, and the batsman thus spared got afterwards fifty runs. Very provoking, and all through Maude Luton and her eyes. However, they won the match, and he had not the remorseful thought on his mind that it was lost by his fault. He did not dream of Maude Luton that night. I do not believe people do dream at night of what is uppermost in their minds by day. It is all a popular error—a delusion. But when at breakfast a letter was brought him with the Cumberford postmark thereon, then his thoughts did fly back to Maude, and her unfathomable eyes danced round



the table. He took the letter, opened it, and found that it was from Tom Hopton, who knew he would be at Oxford. It was one long panegyric of the new arrival, Miss Maude Luton.

Sydney could not help fancying that all this was cunningly devised to lure him to Cumberford. Our friend hesitated a little while. He felt inclined to go on to Cumberford at once. He could get a dogcart, and drive over in two or three hours, and so avoid the bother of railway travelling altogether.

He felt a singular curiosity to see and know more of this singular young lady, whose sparkling manner was so refreshing, and whose eyes puzzled him; but he remembered he had other engagements; and, though somewhat loath, he wrote to say he could not come just at present.

have cleared end of business to attend to," he said; "and after I priority to your kind I have some promises to fulfil which claim up, I fear—and quite incapable. My father is very unwell—breaking of business to go over with our agent, <sup>reading</sup> to business. I have a lot and don't choose to leave with the sole control. <sup>I don't like, don't trust,</sup> there is a new shaft to be opened soon on our Welsh Coast <sup>I hear</sup> and though we don't work it ourselves, I must be there to arrange about the 'royalty.' After that I must run up to London. I have promised to go to the Epsom Spring meeting with some fellows, and there is a 'horse-dinner' at my club which I am engaged for—in short, I have enough on hand to occupy me a fortnight or three weeks; and I dare say when I am in town I shall take another week for my own private diversion and fancy. I am delighted to hear what you say about the Fairford fly-fishing. See the person, and arrange for a month or six weeks, commencing a month from this date, when I can promise to come down. Don't stick at the expense—I should consider half as much again as the sum you mention cheap, considering the advantages, not the least among which is proximity to Cumberford, of which you remind me. Remember me to David and Doctor Luton,

and thank the doctor for me for his invitation. Believe me, old fellow, I have not become too proud, as you think, through prosperity, to remember old friends, nor too *blasé*, by town life and excitement, not to appreciate the comfort and pleasure of a visit to quiet old Cumberford.

Faithfully yours,

SYDNEY JOHN DAVENPORT."

Having sent this letter, he packed up his traps and started for Somersetshire, where for the present we will leave him.

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## CHAPTER V.

## MAUDE LUTON AND TOM HOPTON.

THE mid-day sun blazed fiercely down on the single long street of Cumberford as Maude Luton, in her uncle's little brougham—which Tom Hopton irreverently called the pill-box—drove through the all-but deserted village. There were only some dozen or so of shops, two inns, and five or six public-houses in all the place.

There was not a soul in the place visible. The labouring men were all in the fields at work, as were many of their wives. No children even were visible; nor even the habitual loafers who hang about the gates of the White Hart; and neither Smithers, the veterinary surgeon, as he called himself, nor Jones, the drunken cobbler; neither Daddy Didcot, the village idiot; nor Bob, the ostler, were visible. The sun had driven them all in; and the long lane of a street, from the bridge up to Dr. Luton's at the other end, was empty.

The brougham drew up at the little gate in the wooden palings which railed in the diminutive front garden, and Maude alighted. No one came to the front door, which was open; so she unfastened the wicket and entered the garden, sauntered carelessly about, plucking such early spring flowers as there were. Meanwhile, the coachman disappeared with horse and brougham through some large gates a little higher up, and the young girl, looking about

her—up the street where the road led, with hedges blossoming with May on either side, to Burford Lees ; down the street, which shone white and dazzling in the noon-day sun ; right and left she looked, and saw she was alone.

A singular reception, she thought, and for a moment felt vexed ; till, remembering the habits of the good old doctor and his small family, she laughed at her petulance ; and seating herself in the shade of a great shrub, commenced making a nosegay.

Now is a good opportunity for devoting a brief space to Dr. Luton, his house, and household.

To begin then. He was no doctor ; that is, no M.D. at all, and never called himself so. On the bright brass plate outside his gate were the words, "D. LUTON, SURGEON ;" and such was all he was, or pretended to be. But for years he had been known as Doctor Luton ; and the poor people and even their betters, would as soon have thought of calling him David Luton at once as of dropping the honorary prefix of Doctor. A right good-hearted, honest, and honourable man was the doctor—one who craved not to amass money, but worked hard at his profession ; living well, saving a little, and giving much in charity. He or his assistants attended promptly any one who sent to him, rich or poor, and gave their best skill and medicine. He sent his bill in, as a matter of course. If they paid him, well and good ; if they could not afford to do so, well and good also. He had his payment in the thought that he had done his best to alleviate human suffering—done as he would be done by. And be it borne in mind, such memories are soothing balm, when one begins to walk slowly down hill towards the grave—a priceless cordial, when stretched on

the death-bed. For twenty years and more David Luton had tended Cumberford, and the neighbourhood many miles around. He had two Unions in his charge, and his district was a wide one. So much so that he required five horses and two assistants to get through his daily work. The doctor, (for so with the reader's permission we will call him, in defiance of the College of Physicians,) was not a wealthy man. When first he had purchased the practice it brought in some three hundred a year. Now he had nine hundred annually on his books, and probably received seven. Of this he possibly saved two hundred pounds a year.

The house was low, old-fashioned, with only one storey, and several gables, which, though they might be picturesque, certainly did not add to the convenience or comfort thereof. It stood by itself, with the stable and coach-house gates on one side, and a mud wall fencing off the kitchen garden from the road on the other. At the commencement of this was a narrow gate, through which the poor patients went by a back way to the surgery door to receive medicine and advice. The kitchen and scullery were in an out-building, communicating with the house by a covered-in passage. Hence it was that neither of the two servants nor the boy had heard Maude's arrival. At the back of the house were cart-hovels, sheds, stables, and a rickyard; also a pigeon-house, a brick-building with tiled roof, and two towers with roofs thereto, where the pigeons had ingress and egress. Past the rickyard, a path led by a stile down across a grass field; thence by the side of a hedge and corn-field down to where the river flowed silently on, bordered by willow trees on one side, rushes and flags on the other. The grassy bank, sloping gently down to the still smoothly-

flowing water, was one of the prettiest spots in the neighbourhood. The bank on one side was thickly covered with trees, whose drooping branches hung over and dipped in the water. Beneath these sheltering boughs there was ample shade and protection from the sun's rays, and here, with punt moored to the bank, Tom Hopton delighted to sit fishing for perch and roach, as the case might be.

Getting tired of her occupation, Maude rose, and entered the house. There was no hall, the front door opening into the shortest of passages, which was closed by a door of green baize, passing which she was in the dining-room. The table was spread with a cold repast, at which Maude was not sorry, for her journey had given her a keen appetite. Cold beef, cold fowl, ham, cheese and salad. She just glanced at the table, and then proceeded to explore in search of some one. She knew every inch of the old place, and passing down the brick passage, paused suddenly, for she heard a monotonous, grinding sound, one she had heard many, many times before—no other than the grinding of pestle and mortar. It came from the surgery of course, a little door to which opened out of the passage. Her dress making very little rustling, she advanced, paused here, and looked in. At first she thought it might be her uncle, or her cousin David; but a glance undeceived her, and a smile broke out over her face as her eye fell upon the operator. He was a short stoutish little man, with a curly head of hair like that of a child; indeed, his face was so youthful in appearance, that she might have thought him a rather stout boy of sixteen or seventeen, had it not been for whiskers, long and pendant—His coat was off, shirt sleeves rolled up

and he was working with a will, talking to himself all the while. In the few moments she stood regarding the unconscious Mr. Tom Hopton, she took in his face and figure; the former round, good tempered looking—the latter also round and decidedly well nourished. She moved slowly in, making at the same time a slight rustling.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed, suddenly stopping grinding but not in the least discomposed. "I didn't hear you come in. You're Miss Luton of course?" Maude smiled, and said she was. "Ah! Been expecting you. Lunch on the table. Governor and David won't be back till evening. Gone a long round. Left me at home to do the honours. Know your room; over the porch. Triangle room we call it." All this was said in a breath, and while he was speaking Tom Hopton was hurriedly putting on a blue flannel jacket, such as is worn by boating and cricketing men.

"I will just run upstairs, Mr. Hopton, (you see I know your name although I have never seen you before,) take my bonnet and cloak off, and then come down to you in the dining-room. Pray finish what you are doing though."

"Not the slightest importance. Needn't be done at all. The boy's work; but I'm never idle. Are you fond of fishing?"

The abrupt question made her laugh, as she replied—

"I don't know, at least, that is to say, I never tried."

"Ah! noble sport; you shall come with me some day. I'll teach you."

Maude went up to her room, much amused at Mr. Tom Hopton's quaintness and familiarity. She found him in

the dining-room when she came down, busily employed in mixing the salad.

"Fond of salad, Miss Luton? I am very. Not one in a hundred knows how to make a salad. I do. You try this presently. Perfect white wine vinegar, none of your nasty malt stuff. I will have it. Comes from London. My own expense you know. Doctor says its all bosh—acetic acid; but I know better. Now then, Miss Luton; beef, ham, or fowl and ham?"

"I think I'll have a little cold beef, and some of your salad, Mr. Hopton."

"Ah! good taste I see," said Mr. Hopton aloud, as he cut the beef. "Sensible girl that," he said to himself; "no humbug about her; none of your 'Just a leetle bit of fowl if you please,' and all that sort of thing." And in proof of his good opinion he cut her three great slices of beef, and helped her to half a plateful of salad.

Fortunately for his continued good opinion of her, Maude was thinking of something else, and said nothing depreciatory of the quantity when he handed her the plate. "Will you have some wine, Miss Luton? There's none on the table, but I've got the keys.

"No, thank you; a glass of ale, please?"

"Sensible girl," said Tom Hopton to himself, as he poured out the ale: "no humbug about her." "We don't have any dinners here at all now," he said presently; "there's seldom more than one of us at home in the day-time, so we keep cold lunch on for two or three hours, and go in for meat tea at seven."

"A very good plan too," replied Maude; it's capital being able to eat when you're hungry and not otherwise."



"Well, you're quite right, I suppose; though it doesn't make any difference to me, for I'm always hungry—have been for the last two hours, only I waited for you, you know, of course."

When they had finished the repast, Tom Hopton put down his knife and fork, and said, abruptly—"Well young lady, what are you going to do now? No one at home till seven, you know; it's one o'clock now, exactly."

"Well; I really don't know," she said.

"Ah! I'm going fishing; you can come too, if you like." To this Maude assented. Mr. Hopton amused her, and she did not feel in the mood to be alone.

"If you are quite certain that I shall not be in your way I will come and look at you. You are not going far, I suppose?"

"Never go out of sight of my semaphore," he said, gravely; "wouldn't do at any price."

"Never go out of sight of what?" asked Maude, who did not catch the word.

"My semaphore, But I'll explain it all to you by-and-bye, and show it you at work—that is, if anything comes in. You know the patch of trees in the middle of the river they call Swan Island?"

"O yes, quite well."

"Ah, well; it's there I'm going to fish. There's some rare large perch about, and I can keep my eye on the pigeon-house all the time."

As to what large perch at Swan Island had to do with the pigeon-house, or why he should keep his eye thereon, Maude Luton had not the most remote idea. However, she put it down in the category of mysteries along with the

"semaphore," and the stranger's prophecy in the train; thinking to herself that time would clear all up.

So Maude in excellent spirits ran upstairs, and changed her dress to a light brown merino, in place of a bonnet put on a coquettish round straw hat, with partridge wing for plume, and then rejoined Mr. Tom Hopton, who was busily engaged about his fishing tackle.

"You know your way, Miss Luton, he said. "If you walk slowly on, down by the hedge, I will catch you up."

As she passed the corner of the pigeon-house, her foot caught in the lines of string which led apparently through a hole in the door of that building. Without troubling herself to think about it, she freed her foot, and was passing on, when a boy called out to her, "Mind, Miss, or else you'll smash up Mr. Hopton's see-em-before."

"Mr. Hopton's what?" she asked, laughing.

"His see'em'fore," he said, slightly varying it. "I works it, and has to keep it straight, and a deal o' trouble it is too."

"Oh," she said to herself, "this is a part of the mysterious semaphore. I suppose I shall know all about it in the course of time."

She walked slowly on, and now that she was alone again commenced thinking and doubtless would soon have fallen into one of her day-dreams. It was a strange trait in this girl, that however merry and high-spirited she might have been previously, she always became serious when alone, and gradually slid from grave thought to melancholy, and from that to almost complete abstraction. However, Tom Hopton caught her before she had got to this pitch, and his ceaseless and merry chatter soon set her laughing again.

They walked on side by side down the hedge, Tom talking all the while, and she occasionally replying by an observation, more frequently by a merry laugh. It was enough for our genial little assistant that he was listened to. He did not require much talking in reply. And so they strolled together along the river bank, she amused and inwardly glad, for his frothy babble diverted her thoughts from herself—he as perfectly at his ease as if they had been acquainted for years. Having made their way to the punt moored close to the bank opposite Swan Island, Mr. Hopton proceeded to arrange his fishing gear; and Maude, seating herself on the well-seat, idly played with the clear water flowing so gently by, till called to order by her companion.

"You musn't do that! You'll frighten all the fish away."

This being forbidden, she looked down the river; admired the smooth, winding sheet of water fringed with the dark willows which hung so gracefully over it, and resolved to sketch and photograph the view from Swan Island.

"Now," said Tom Hopton, having arranged everything to his satisfaction, "you can see the towers of the pigeon-house, can't you? I mean the places at the top where they go in?"

"Yes?"

"Well, my semaphore's fixed there, and very likely you'll see it work presently. It depends, however; but you keep looking at it every now and again, and tell me if you see anything."

Thereupon Tom cautiously dropped in his baited line, and, with eye intent, like a terrier watching a rat-hole,

devoted himself wholly to the perch. A quarter of an hour passed ; half an hour ; and Maude began to incline to the opinion that this was very dull. It is a wonder she did not fall a dreaming, but a certain spark of curiosity had been aroused in her mind by Mr. Hopton's request for her to keep her eye on the pigeon-house. As for that gentleman, his talkativeness and vivacity had totally disappeared. No longer did a rapid flow of disjointed, half-completed sentences flow from his lips. All his faculties were engrossed by the rod and line, and the finny inhabitants of the still, deep water, who it seemed were determined not to be caught.

"Oh ! look there ! What is that ? A flight of pigeons !"

Tom Hopton looked up at the exclamation, and almost dropped the rod from his hands, "Halloo ! By jingo, there they go ! By Jove, my semaphore's at work. One—two ! Are there two flags, Miss Luton ? That means come quick, somebody's ill. I can't see quite plain ; a bit of dust blew in my eye coming along the road. It is two flags, is it not ?"

Maude now began to comprehend the working of Tom Hopton's semaphore, and with her keen gaze made out *three* flags which were waving about in the most wild manner.

"One, two, three," she said, "and they are all waving about."

"Three ! By Jupiter, it's an accident—a terrible accident ! Bone setting, amputation, all sorts of things. I know what it is. Farmer Dodson's steam-engine thrashing up at the barn. Thought I heard an explosion—didn't you ?"

"I can't say I did, really," she replied.

"Ah ! didn't you ? But that's it. I was talking to the engineer fellow yesterday, as he was mending the boiler. He said it would not last long. Yes, that's it no doubt. Let's see, how many men. One, the man who tends it. He's blown to pieces, killed right out, I expect. Then there's the boy—there's always a boy hurt in these accidents I notice; and five men with the thrashing-machine. One killed; boy and five men badly hurt and scalded."

This he gave vent to with marvellous volubility, all the while making desperate efforts to disentangle his line from some weeds in which it had caught. But as each moment he only got it into a worse mess, he finally threw down the rod in despair.

"There they go, waving about like old boots ! Bother that boy ! How he is working the semaphore ! He might perhaps have used a stronger expletive had it not been for the presence of the young lady. "Excuse me, Miss Luton. You can go on fishing, if you like—that is, if you can get my line disentangled. I'm off."

And leaping out of the punt, away he went at the top of his speed. Maude, despite the thought of the probable accident signalled by the semaphore, could not help laughing as she saw his short legs trampling along the path, individually invisible, like the spokes of a wheel. She sat still for a little while, looking anon along the quiet water, watching some moor-hens, and dab-chicks down the river, and occasionally glancing up at the flags, which continued waving as furiously as ever for some ten minutes, and then suddenly stopped.

"Ah ! she said to herself, "now he has arrived on the scene of action, and the semaphore has of course ceased

to signal. Goodness, how he did run!" And she smiled again at the thought of the short fat body borne so quickly on by the short legs.

Slowly she sank into thought; and her late companion in the railway train presented himself unbidden to her memory. "I wonder why I am always thinking of that absurd man, with his ridiculous prophecy that we should meet again! How on earth though could he have known me, whence I came, and whither I was going?" She puzzled her head for the twentieth time in vain over this problem, and then exclaimed pettishly—

"Bah; its not worth thinking of. I will not think of it any more."

Just at that moment, looking towards the house, she again saw the three flags fluttering away as bravely as ever.

"I wonder what they are doing that for," she thought; and then, having no idea of the truth, she suffered the subject to glide from her mind. Her eyes sought the placid expanse of water, and her thoughts wandered away, —far away; and soon she lost all control over them, and was in fairy land. She was startled by a shout, and looking up, saw a figure, which she recognized as Tom Hopton's, running towards her and waving his hat.

Instantly there shot across her mind the conviction, first that she was wanted, secondly that something was the matter. So she sprang lightly from the boat and ran to meet Mr. Hopton. When she reached him, he was panting, and quite out of breath; so when he turned and walked quickly back towards the house, she kept pace with him, waiting till he should have recovered sufficiently to tell her what was the matter.

"Whatever is the matter, Mr. Hopton?" she cried, noticing that he was very pale, and trembling with excitement.

"Dr. Luton," he gasped.

"My uncle! Has anything happened to him?" she cried, bounding on yet faster.

"Yes, yes—an accident! Fell from his horse. David has brought him home in a fly."

Maude waited to hear no more. Her uncle, good, kind Dr. Luton, who had been to her indeed a father, was injured—perhaps dying.

Swiftly her nimble feet bore her over the ground, and in a very short space of time Tom Hopton was far behind. Her hat flew off in the course of her rapid run; but she did not stop to pick it up, leaving that for Mr. Hopton to do. Arrived at the house, she passed straight through the kitchen, where the two servant girls and the boy were, pale and frightened-looking; though, as they had been two years in the house, they must have had some experience of sudden illnesses and accidents.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

MAUDE LUTON passed along the passage and entered the drawing-room, pale and breathless, to find herself confronted by David Luton, her cousin. He shook her hand silently, and in answer to her inquiry, "My uncle, how is he?" replied gravely, "As bad as it is possible for him to be, Maude; he is all but insensible. We have not yet examined him; but I fear, from the partial paralysis, that the spine is injured. Mr. Acton, the eminent surgeon, will be here in a very few minutes."

"Can I see him? Do let me see him?" she prayed eagerly. "Where is he?"

"In the little room. But you cannot see him yet. I will let you know when we have examined him."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the door of a room opening from the dining-room. This had two windows on to the little grass-plot in front, and in the olden days of her girlhood Maude used to dignify it with the name of her drawing-room, and take great pride in decorating it with flowers, china ornaments, pictures, and pretty books on the little round table. A low moan came from this room as her cousin ceased speaking. He put her gently outside the door into the passage.

"Go up to your room, there's a good girl; you will only be in the way and do harm here."



At this half reproof, Maude clasped her hands, and silently obeyed. She seated herself at the little window over the porch, and listened and looked anxiously up the road for signs of the expected surgeon. She saw him coming—a black speck on the white road; and as she heard the sound of his galloping horse, and saw him pull up and hastily dismount at the door, hope rose in her heart. He was such a clever man, Mr. Acton. People said there were few cleverer surgeons in England, and surely his skill would save her uncle. Then came a period of desperate suspense and anxiety.

Maude, who loved her uncle with the passionate devotion of which only such a nature as hers was capable, waited, and waited, and tried to pray; but she could not, her brain was in a whirl, and her mind refused to form the sentences of a coveted prayer. But nevertheless, in her heart she prayed. Now that it seemed probable they were to lose him, she recalled his never varying kindness and consideration. His calm, grave, equable temper, unruffled by any annoyance she in her childhood inflicted on him. She thought of his goodness of heart—his genuine kindness, and the many marks of affection he had lavished on her, his wayward niece. She remembered some sentences in her letter from Miss Martin's, in which she petulantly reproached him for keeping her in ignorance of her own history, and so allowing her to be exposed to insult. Bitterly she regretted those, as she now considered them, undutiful expressions. "Her dear kind uncle," she said to herself, "would have told her, if it had been necessary for her to know." Presently she gave vent to her grief in tears, and afterwards felt relieved and more composed. Then she remembered that

there was hope—plenty of hope, she said. Surely the Almighty would spare so good a man, whose life was an example—a ceaseless labour for the good of others.

She waited and listened outside her door, in anxious expectation for the end of the consultation. Would it never end? She waited, and waited, till she could wait no longer, and then she stole softly down the stairs into the dining-room, and listened at the door of the other room. It was open, probably to give the sufferer air. She could hear his difficult, laboured breathing, and above that the low murmur of talk between Mr. Acton and David. Tom Hopton was there too; but he was quite silent. She only heard disjointed fragments of the conversation, and much of it was unintelligible to her from its technical phraseology.

“I fear there can be no doubt of it. There is evidently a dislocation or a fracture here—(turn him over a little more, Mr. Hopton,)—between the shoulders. I am afraid it is a fracture; and from the complete paralysis of the lower limbs, coupled with partial paralysis of the arms and diaphragm, causing the difficulty in breathing, I think there can be little doubt but that the spinal cord is severely lacerated.”

“Can nothing be done?” asked David Luton, in a low tone. “Is it not possible that it is only a dislocation; and may we not attempt to reduce it?”

“It is possible, certainly; but as to any attempt to move the vertebræ, I must say no. I have attempted it once or twice—seen it attempted often; I have never known a case succeed; and the result frequently is, sudden death—from fresh injury, or even complete snapping of the cord.”

"What, then, is your opinion? Do you think there is any hope?" asked David Luton, in a hoarse whisper.

"My dear sir, I will answer you freely and frankly. You are a surgeon yourself, and as such, should always be prepared for the worst. Our unfortunate friend here has received a very severe injury to the spine—probably all but destroying the spinal cord at the spot. The proof of this is, the complete paralysis of the lower members, and partially of the arms. Also, the difficulty of breathing indicates paralysis of the intercostal and abdominal muscles. There is, besides, partial paralysis of the diaphragm. I think there is no hope whatever. He may linger for days, in a state of hemiplegia, but he will surely die of weakness and exhaustion. Probably, when he recovers from the shock to the system in general, and the brain in particular, he will recover consciousness, so as to be able to convey his last wishes. In cases like this patients are usually sensible to the last, and die, as I have said he will die, from exhaustion."

"Nothing, then, can be done?" said poor David, in a tone of utter misery.

"All that you can do is to make him as comfortable as possible, administer stimulants when he seems weak and faint, see that the pillows are so placed as to give as little pain as possible; in fact, soothe his last moments, and ease his way to death—or rather that other life in which I know our poor friend was so sincere a believer. A recovery is not impossible, of course; but it would be almost a miracle."

These words dissipated any gleam of hope which David Luton had for his father's life. He had the highest opinion

of Mr. Aston's judgment and skill, and knew that he had the reputation of never giving a patient up until, humanly speaking, there was no hope.

And the pale frightened listener at the door too; she heard the words, and stole away again as noiselessly as she had come. For awhile she sat in her own little bed-room almost in a state of stupor, but the sound of the horse's hoof-falls, as the surgeon rode off, aroused her. Slowly she regained courage and composure, as she thought it should be her task to watch by the side of her dying uncle. She had heard enough to convince her that there was no hope of his recovery; and now that she was fully aware of the fact, she seemed to derive fresh strength and fortitude. She went down to the dining-room, and called gently to her cousin—"David."

He came out of the inner room at the sound of her voice, looking very grave, but with no extravagant expression of grief on his features.

"Maude," he said quietly, "there is no hope. All we can do is to see that he wants nothing, that his slightest wish is attended to, and try to alleviate his pain. He is conscious now, and knows that he will die."

"Can I see him?"

"Not now, Maude; it is better not. He has as yet scarcely recovered from the shock of the fall. We have given him an opiate, and he seems free from pain and inclined for sleep."

"But may I not watch by him?" she pleaded.

"Not now, Maude. I and Hopton will take it in turns all night; to-morrow one of us must go round to the patients; then you shall watch while the other takes

some rest. I do not think there is any fear of him to-night."

"You are quite sure?"

"How you talk. I am sure of nothing. His life is in the hands of the Almighty; but I believe from the symptoms that there is no danger of his being called away suddenly."

"You will let me know if he is worse? Oh! pray do not let him die without my seeing him!"

This David promised, and reiterated his opinion that the patient would last some considerable time. Perhaps it was his father's own words which made him speak so confidently.

"David, my boy," he said feebly, so soon as he regained consciousness, "I am done for." He made a feeble effort to move, and then murmured—"Useless, useless; hemiplegia—fracture of one of the upper vertibræ of the spine. Any other injuries, David?" the dying surgeon asked, quite composedly.

"No, father."

"Ah! I shall die slowly then, David. I have sensation in my fingers, though I cannot move them in the slightest. Place one finger of my right hand on the pulse of the left. Ah! that is it. Yes I can feel it—still strong; thirty-six hours, David. I think I shall die thirty-six hours from this time."

"Are you in any pain, father?"

"No pain—no pain; only weak, and a little drowsy. Ah! you have been giving me an opiate. I thought I tasted opium in the cordial. Maude; has she come?"

"Yes! Will you see her. She is in a terrible way poor girl."

"Poor girl, indeed. No; I will not see her now. I will wait till the morning, after I have slept; but David, don't let me die without seeing her. I have something to say to her—something to tell her. Promise me that David?"

"Dear father, you know that you have only to express a wish."

"Thank you David. If my breathing becomes worse you must raise me up. Partial paralysis of the diaphragm—that's a symptom, David, which gives no hope."

The good surgeon murmured on thus for a little while, and then sank to sleep under the influence of the opiate.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DYING WORDS OF DR. LUTON.

THE meeting at the breakfast-table the next morning was a sad one. David Luton had sat up nearly the whole night, and this, with grief and anxiety, gave him a dismally haggard appearance. His dark hair and eyes caused his pallor to be more conspicuous, his thin intellectual face being perfectly devoid of colour. The sufferer had awoke about five o'clock, and expressed a desire to be moved to his bed-room, which was accomplished by Hopton and his son without pain or inconvenience. He again went to sleep, and awoke about eight o'clock very weak, but quite sensible, and able to talk without difficulty.

"Let Maude come to me after breakfast," he said; "and hang my watch up so that I can see it. I have slept nearly twelve hours of the thirty-six I allowed myself."

David told Maude that her uncle wished to see her, and with beating heart she accompanied her cousin to his room. A glance at his face might have told even an inexperienced person that he was dying—slowly, it is true, but still dying. There was an expression of care and anxiety—a haggard look impossible to describe, and a hue equally indescribable; but both together sure forerunners of dissolution. No one who has seen many persons die can have failed to have observed the singular

expression and tint which overspreads the face of the moribund.

"David," he said, as Maude, silently gliding to the bedside, took his hand, "leave me alone with Maude."

"Dear uncle," she said, "do not tire or distress yourself by talking."

"Talking does not cause me pain. I must speak, and that now, or my failing strength will rob me of the opportunity. I received your letter, Maude," he said, after pausing a few moments, "and it gave me great pain."

"Oh! my dear uncle, forgive me! I am very, very ~~sorry~~ I wrote so petulantly."

"No, Maude," he replied, "you have nothing to ask forgiveness for. It is my fault. I should have spoken to you before; but I looked upon you as a child, and thought I would wait till you had come to woman's estate. Now I see you are almost a woman. I will tell you all I know concerning yourself, and your mother, my sister, whom I hope to meet ere long in another world, for I am very weak. That is brandy-and-water beside you on the table—give me some! You see," and he glanced at his white, paralysed hands, "I am quite helpless."

She did as he asked her; and then he commenced his recital—pausing frequently for a minute or two at a time, but never losing coherence or the thread of his narrative. Maude sat silently by his side, holding one of his hands in hers, and occasionally giving him a little brandy-and-water.

"More than twenty years ago, Maude, I, then a young man, with all the world before me, purchased this practice at Cumberford, at an exceedingly low price; indeed, had



it not been so, I could not have bought it, as my resources were scanty. Even at that early period of life I had seen trouble and adversity. I was a widower, left with an infant daughter, and a son, two years of age,—your cousin David. After the death of my wife, your mother, my dear sister Maude, came to live with me and keep house. She was an exceedingly beautiful girl, accomplished, and as good as she was beautiful. For two years all went smoothly enough. My practice was slowly improving, and brought me sufficient to live comfortably, while the interest of my sister's two thousand pounds sufficed her for dress and pocket-money. I know not when it first began, but slowly there came a change over your mother's manner. She grew silent, reserved, and thoughtful, and would often be absent for hours alone. I did not question her, as she was her own mistress, and I had entire confidence in her prudence and rectitude. I was right about her rectitude, for a better or purer woman than your mother never lived; but as to her prudence, alas! I fear I over-rated it. It seems that she contracted an attachment to some person who forbade her to reveal their love. Then, I knew not who it was; since, I have been able to form an opinion—so strong as to amount almost to certainty—as to the identity of this, at that time, unknown man.

“There is no doubt that his will was stronger than hers—that he exercised unlimited control over my gentle, trusting sister. At last it came—your mother left my house early one morning. There was a note for me from her on the breakfast-table when I came down, in which she humbly and earnestly implored my pardon. She had

long been engaged in secret, and had left to be married. Her future husband implored her to keep her marriage secret, for family reasons, and she felt bound to obey. She had every confidence in his love and honour, and would write and inform me of his name the instant she was at liberty to do so. Finally, she assured me that the match was not one of which she need be ashamed—that in birth and position he was her superior. This was the only hint in her note which gave the least clue as to who it could be with whom she had eloped. I had my suspicions at the time, and since then they have received confirmation. Though startled, and at first a little alarmed, I finally persuaded myself that all was well, and waited patiently to hear from my sister of her marriage and her new name.

“In a week I received another letter from her, without date or place of address. The postmark however, denoted that it came from Cumberland, in the north of England. She was married, she said, and very happy. Her husband was very kind to her, very fond of her, but he still forbade her to reveal their marriage. This letter caused me some uneasiness—I had heard and read so much of marriages concealed for family reasons. However, I could do nothing but wait, and hope for the best. She wrote to me pretty regularly at first; and for some months the tone of her letters were cheerful, and I consoled myself with the thought that at least she was happy. But there came a change, and in one letter she told me that which alarmed me greatly. She said that her husband had an attack of what she called brain fever; but from the symptoms she described it could have been nothing of the sort, but an attack of mania—in other words, madness. She had

given me an address at a post-office where I might write to her. I did so at once, urging her at all hazards to let me, her nearest relation, know her husband's name and station. I told her that it was her duty to herself and him, no matter what he said. If he insisted on it, I would faithfully keep the secret for any reasonable time. Finally I hinted, as delicately as I could, my impression, that, from what she said, her husband was liable to attacks of insanity. I have reason to believe she never received this letter; possibly it was intercepted by her husband. I did not hear from her again for more than a month. She made no mention of my last letter to her, but wrote in a deep state of despondency. I could discern through the veil of wifely love and duty with which she endeavoured to disguise the truth, that her husband was harsh to her—that he was of violent and uncertain temper. Of this I felt sure; but the whole tenor of the letter gave rise, in my mind, to other suspicions of a terrible nature with respect to this unknown husband of my sister. Though sorely troubled and harassed in mind, I was powerless to act. She seemed completely under her husband's control—to have no will but his. This I knew by the general tone of her letters, and by expressions let drop as it were accidentally. And thus time passed on, till a year and a month had passed. Then, to my mingled joy and sorrow, I came home one day from my morning round, and found that my dear sister had returned. She brought an infant with her—a girl; it was yourself, Maude. She was worn dreadfully thin, and bore traces of long suffering, mental and bodily. She was excited and hysterical on meeting me, and threw herself weeping into my arms. "Oh! brother,"

she cried, "forgive me for this hasty marriage without consulting you; but I did love him so, I never thought he would have behaved so wickedly—so cruelly to me."

"My dear child, I said welcome home. Here you shall ever find a refuge. And so this tyrant husband of yours has been unkind to you—has ill-used you?"

"Oh! she cried, in plaintive accents, if that were all, I would not mind. But to desert me, and for another!"

"Desert you, Maude! Tell me his name! Has he dared to leave you for some worthless woman?"

"Worthless woman! Alas, perhaps, like me, a victim to his fascinations. And they say he will marry her too—marry her, make her his wife; and she will bear his name and call him husband. Have mercy Heaven, and take me from this wretched world!"

"Here she gave way to a passionate burst of grief, and it was long before she was composed enough to talk. She sat by the window there, Maude, while I paced up and down the room in anger and excitement."

"But he cannot marry another," I urged. "I see you have a wedding ring on; you have also, I hope, proof of your marriage?"

"Oh, yes, yes; plenty. I will convince you, if you doubt me."

"No, no," I said; "I do not doubt you, dear sister. But your fears mislead you; he can never wed another, if you are indeed his wife."

"Ah! David," she said, sadly, "you do not know him. He dare do anything—would do anything he chose."

"Then, by Heavens," I cried, "if he do such a thing as that, he shall suffer felon's punishment."

"She turned pale, and looked frightened, but replied not a word. I urged her in vain to reveal to me this man's name, in order that I might compel him to do her justice; but she steadfastly refused, at least for the present. 'Not now, brother; not now; another time perhaps. I am ill now; my head burns; let me rest, please.' I saw she was feverish and ill, so prevailed on her to go to bed, and sent up the village for a nurse on whom I could depend, one Molly Rumble, to attend on the sick mother and you, her infant. I had another round to do that day—for then, Maude, I could not afford an assistant—and started about three in the afternoon, intending to return to tea at seven. But a dangerous case detained me all night, and I did not arrive at home till twelve the next day. The nurse, Molly Rumble, met me at the door. I knew by her face that something was wrong. Silently and tremblingly I followed her upstairs into this very room. My sister lay on a sofa drawn up to the window. She was propped up by pillows, and gazed out with wild and glittering eyes, constantly muttering to herself the while. I saw how it was almost at once. She was delirious, and sinking fast. A violent fever, intermittent in its character, had seized upon her shortly after my departure, and I had very little hopes of her life. I noticed a lot of torn paper, and the ashes of more on the hearth. The nurse told me that on the previous night she had asked for one of her boxes which was filled with books and papers, and it having been brought for her, had set to work tearing up and burning all the contents. At that time, the nurse had no idea there was anything wrong, and it was not till near midnight that she was alarmed by

her wild ravings, flushed face, and obvious state of raging fever. Towards morning it went off, leaving her very weak, and still in a state of semi-delirium. She insisted on being dressed and brought to the window. There she had been gazing out until my arrival, looking intently across Holford Lees to Holford Hall, which could just be distinguished among the trees. I had her put to bed at once; but my forebodings were fulfilled, for she sank slowly and surely, and expired on the following evening. She never breathed the name of her husband, and in her delirium had destroyed all papers which might have enlightened me. But as she sat at the window on the morning of my return, she constantly gazed at Holford Hall, indistinctly visible in the distance. Many expressions, too, she made use of in her delirium, gave rise to a vague suspicion in my mind. She spoke of you, her child, named after herself, Maude—pointed with her thin hand to Holford Lees, stretching from the end of this village for miles around and up to the park gates of the Hall. ‘All my child’s—all my Maude’s—all hers! She shall have her rights—her rights! See that she has her rights—the heiress of Holford Hall.’ But there was so much incoherence in her talk, that it was with difficulty that I could make even this out; and in the state she was then in, I paid little or no attention thereto. Once or twice on the night before she died, too, she gave utterance to a name—the name of the young heir to the property, who had but lately come into possession.”

“And that name, uncle?” asked Maude, breathlessly.

“Walter Stanton de Vere—that was his name; and many circumstances have led me long ago to the conclusion that it was he who had eloped with and married my

poor sister. He was absent all the time she was away ; but then, that was scarcely matter for wonder. He was a strange young man—of most ungovernable temper and subject to fits of frenzy ; and people even whispered, not without a taint of insanity. If it was he who married and deserted your mother, he was spared the crime of bigamy by her death ; but not by any scruple or fear of his—for he was married again the very week in which your mother died. It was to a very beautiful woman, people said, a singer at the opera. After his marriage he went abroad for a year. He returned with a foreign nurse and an infant daughter—his wife died abroad. It seemed that a curse rested on him, for a few days after he came back to his own estate he was found dead, with a gun beside him in the park. I made the *post mortem* examination and gave evidence at the coroner's inquest. 'Accidental death' they brought it in—though many people whispered that he destroyed himself during one of his fits of madness. But He above, who knows all things, knows whether he was a suicide—But, pardon, Maude, I see I pain you ; I forgot that if my strong suspicions were correct, this man was your father."

Maude, who had been listening, with every sense strung up to a pitch of tension hereupon exclaimed, passionately—"Yes—yes ! Oh ! uncle, I am sure it was—it was my unhappy, misguided father who thus perished !"

She was very excited and hysterical ; and Dr. Luton, though himself slowly fading away, retained all his faculties and instincts as a medical man, and with sublime self-forgetfulness even prescribed some composing medicine which he thought would calm her now obviously intense excitement, and procure her some sleep.

"David," he called, faintly, "Maude is a very strange girl—strange, mentally and physically; hers is one of those constitutions in which the mind either acts on the body or preys on itself. She is hysterical. Take care of her, David, when I am gone—for my sake; watch over her as though she were your sister. Beware of any sudden excitement—any shock. She has extraordinary ability, strong affections—a mind of great power; and yet there is that in her manner, her look—above all, in her eye, which to me seems to betoken great peril."

"For her health, father?"

"For the health of her mind, David, A sudden shock, or brooding over an injury real or fancied, might dethrone that girl's reason, and leave her a hopeless maniac—an object of fear and horror. Aye, beautiful specimen though she be of nature's purest work, woman. See to her, David; see to her—poor Maude; fatherless, motherless, alone in the world."

The sufferer, every hour becoming weaker, dropped off to sleep, still muttering to himself, and thinking of his niece. She, too, having taken an opiate without knowing it, fell asleep, and to her intense surprise, did not awake till the servant came to call her, and tell her that Mr. David wished to see her. She made a hasty toilette, and descended to the breakfast-table, to hear the sad news that the end of the good surgeon was rapidly approaching, and that he would not live beyond an hour or two. He retained the faculty of speech, and knew every one to the last, but his murmured narrative was slightly incoherent. His mind still seemed to run on the subject on which he had been speaking to his niece the evening



before. She, kneeling at his bed-side, held one hand in hers—alas ! it was incapable of returning even the faintest pressure. Shortly before noon he seemed to revive wonderfully, and his voice, before faint and indistinct, was now clear. He spoke to his son David, who stood sorrowfully on the other side of the bed, concerning some poor patients, whom he assisted, not only with medicine and advice, but with food and wine.

“Do your duty, David, my boy—to rich and poor alike; don’t be over greedy of money, nor study so deeply as to neglect more urgent calls on your time, David, David, you’re a good lad, and will be a clever surgeon; but don’t forget, that while you are studying the theory of life and the connection of mind and matter, a poor body may be perishing for want of your skill. Ah ! I am going now. Hold my hand, David. Death—death ! It is not so dreadful after all.”

A marked change came suddenly over his features, complexion, and eyes.

“Maude, Maude, where are you ? Poor girl. I can’t say more—I can’t tell you all I would. Molly Rumble, at the turnpike-gate, can tell you more. It is getting dark—No, it is the lamp of life fading out.”

A slight tremor shook him, and he heaved a deep sigh or two. David Luton felt his pulse, thinking that he was gone ; but suddenly the dying man raised his head, and his shoulders moved convulsively.

“Thirty-six hours—I said thirty-six hours. Sister, I am coming. Yes, yes ; I know. Holford Lees, and Holford Hall—all Maude’s. She shall have her rights—her rights ! Heiress of Holford Hall !”

His voice died away again to a murmur, and David said—"Alas, the last delirium of death is on him; the end is near indeed, now."

But Maude observed in silence—drank in every word he uttered, straining her hearing to the utmost, so as to lose not a syllable. What he said sank deep into her mind. To her, it was not the muttering of delirium, but the solemn prophecy of one on the threshold of another world. The idea, whatever may have been its exact nature, had evidently got strong hold of the dying man. Presently, he again raised himself partly, and in a stronger voice said—

"Holford Lees! Holford Lees and Holford Hall! Maude! Ah!—"

His head fell back on the pillow—he fetched one or two deep breaths, then there was perfect stillness and silence. His son, David, who had his hand on his pulse all the while, waited for perhaps a minute; then he laid the cold white hand gently on the bed, and walking to the window, slowly pulled down the blind. The spirit of David Luton the elder, had fled, and there now lay on the bed naught / but lifeless clay.

The closing of the blind was the first intimation Maude had that all was over. She rose, and silently laid down the hand of the now dead man. Neither she nor the bereaved son gave vent to their grief in noisy outcry. A few tears trickled down the pale face of David. But Maude was unable to weep; her throat was dry and parched, her skin hot, and a burning headache tormented her.

Tom Hopton alone wept loud and long—kind-hearted, innocent Tom Hopton, cried like a school-boy, when he

returned and learned that all was over. Maude respected him, liked him for it ; and from that day he was an especial favourite with her. The inhabitants of Cumberford seeing the blinds down, knew that a good and Christian gentleman had passed from among them ; and when Dr. Luton was borne to his grave, the bier was followed by numbers, rich and poor, who had known and appreciated the social qualities, professional skill, and Christian virtues of the deceased.

From that day a new era commenced in the life of Maude Luton.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## TOM HOPTON'S THEORIES AND SPECULATIONS.

FOR some days after the funeral, things went on at the house of the late Dr. Luton in a subdued, silent manner. David was naturally taciturn, and feeling deeply his father's death, he scarce spoke at all now, except on matters of business or necessity. On Maude, too, the sudden loss of her uncle and guardian fell very heavily. It was the first death she could remember. No one that she had ever known had died till now, and a mental numbness, analagous to that produced on the body by a sudden blow, had come over her ; and for days afterwards she scarce thought of the future, or what would be her course of action. But as the body slowly recovers from the effects of shock or blow, so did her mind gradually recover tone. As for Tom Hopton, he was outwardly the most affected of any ; though he bore no relationship, he went into deep mourning, and wore a hat-band as high as that of David Luton himself. His merry ohirruping gossip seemed permanently silenced. No more did he take delight in fishing for gigantic perch (which he never caught), or for problematical barbel (which he never saw). As for the much-vaunted semaphore, since the fatal day when it had signalled the accident to the late master of the house he had abominated the name of it ; and on an early occasion he

utterly destroyed the ingenious arrangement of strings and flags.

There came a letter to David Luton the day after the funeral, from Sydney Davenport. It was full of genuine sympathy and sorrow, and expressed the writer's determination of putting off his visit, not wishing to intrude on the grief of the household. David threw the letter over to Hopton, who read it, and asked "Shall you answer it?"

"You do so," replied the young surgeon, wearily. Ask him to come down—say, in a month's time. We need not stand on any ceremony with Davenport. It is a friend of ours, Maude," he said, apologetically, to his cousin; "my poor father liked him very much. We were apprenticed to him, Tom and I. Since then, he has come into a large property. But it has not made him in the least proud; he is as good a fellow as ever. Perhaps, though, you would object to company, so soon after——"

"No, David, not at all. If my uncle could signify his wishes from that other world, where he now is, I feel sure he would like the chosen friends of his life to visit his son."

"He is a first-rate fellow, is Davenport; and I am sure you will like him." So a letter was despatched, asking Sydney Davenport to come down in a month; and in due course an answer was received, saying that he would do so.

Maude had, at David's request, undertaken the superintendence of the household. She was quite ignorant, or nearly so, of all the details of house management, but seemed to adapt herself with marvellous facility, and even

the servants who had been for years without female authority over them, acknowledged that Miss Maude knew what she was about. At first they sulked a little ; but their new mistress's quiet, determined nature soon bore down all opposition and that in the most gentle manner in the world. Day after day passed on and gradually the gloom attendant on their loss—the shadow which Death in sweeping by had left behind him, grew less sombre, and things fell into an ordinary every-day groove. Of course there was more work for Tom Hopton and David, now that one of the three labourers in the vineyard had been taken away. And Maude, too, who entered zealously and conscientiously on the duties she had undertaken, “ only temporarily,” as she again and again repeated to herself found that she had plenty to do. Still, however, she had abundant time for thought.

The memory of the last words of her uncle, clung to her persistently. “ Molly Rumble, at the turnpike ”—that she had not forgotten ; nor was it often out of her mind. She was of opinion however, that to busy herself about her own affairs and feelings immediately after her uncle's death would be to show a want of respect to his memory ; and the very day when the invitation was despatched to Sydney Davenport she had fixed on a month from then as the date before which she would not make any inquiries, or indeed think at all on the subject, if she could help it. But she could not help it. The tale told her by her dying uncle, in faint, dying tones, anon almost fading away altogether, broken by long pauses, and not all consecutive and straightforward as the reader has it—this tale perpetually haunted her ; she persuaded herself, that, beyond all doubt, she was

the daughter of this man Stanton de Vere, who had married her mother; then deserted her; who had then married another woman; and finally—(here God's avenging providence stepped in she thought)—destroyed himself. Yes, he was her father; this Stanton de Vere—this wild, ungovernable, fierce-tempered man. But she owed him no duty, no respect. "Holford Lees—Holford Hall, the heiress of Holford Hall."

The words of the dying man, spoken in the last delirium, were to her as true as gospel; she never doubted their truth, though she knew nothing of the De Vere family, or the tenure of the estates. In a short time she said to herself, she would see this Molly Rumble, and know all; and then—Ah? what then? All in the future was a hazy blank. She doubted not, however, that in due course light would appear, and she would see her path clear before her.

All this while her character was slowly developing. Her sanguine, enthusiastic nature, ripe to receive any impression, had received one; and on this subject certainly she slowly became imbued with fatalism. Indeed, her character slowly formed itself somewhat after the mould of the fanatical Mussulman, who, believing that an end in view was destined to be accomplished, fought with blind, unreasoning, reckless devotion for the attainment of that end.

At the end of a fortnight her thoughts were so far diverted from the past that she began to take some interest in her cousin David, whom at first she looked on as a nobody, —merely the son of her uncle, in fact. But she soon became aware that the tall, pale-faced, but handsome student

had a great deal in him, and some things in common with herself. He was as enthusiastic and unflinching in purpose as she was. He was learned, too, and had wild, visionary views, which enlisted her respect, though she could not understand them. When he found, as people very quickly do in such cases, that she took an interest in his conversation, and was eager for information on scientific subjects he delighted in talking with her—to the dismay of Tom Hopton, whose ideas of science did not go beyond the *Pharmacopœia* and Gray's *Anatomy*, and who did not even know the meaning of the word *metaphysica*.

David Luton had some extraordinary theories—no, not theories, his ideas were not developed enough for that—but let us say notions, speculations, embryo theories on some subjects. He firmly believed that the introduction of fluids into the blood, directly by the veins, was a subject almost unexplored, and pregnant with great results. The transfusion of blood from the veins of a healthy person to those of a sick one he also believed might be productive of marvellous results. He held that the common practise of introducing all medicines by means of the stomach was a piece of clumsy barbarism, worthy of the dark ages in which it originated. Why should the organs of digestion be forced to do all their own work, and work not in their province? He held that the stomach or alimentary canal was designed solely for the assimilation of food. In some cases, of course, it was convenient and proper that medicines should mix with the food and be deposited all over the body with the fresh-formed blood; but in many cases he argued, it was productive of harm. But on this subject his great theory was the transfusion of blood. He held



that when this should be properly understood, life would be almost indefinitely prolonged, at least by those who could command the blood of others, by purchase or otherwise. The subject, though to many girls it would have been repugnant or a cause for laughter, was full of interest to Maude. She listened to him patiently, and soon began to understand the technicalities he used, and to grasp the whole idea in all its grandeur, "Herein," she said once, if what he says be true, lies the secret of what the ancient alchemists strove so hard for—the 'Elixir of Life.'"

Then, too, he had other strange notions on the origin of nervous force, and the connection of mind with matter. David Luton was a materialist, and maintained that the Scriptures bore him out in his views. "The mind, or soul," he argued, "was but an etherealised body—purer, more beautiful, and free from earthly defects. When soul and body parted, the ethereal portion soared away; but though in ordinary cases invisible, impalpable, it nevertheless existed as an actual material reality."

The young surgeon was a believer in supernatural appearances, and maintained, again backing his argument by the Bible, that under certain circumstances, and subject to certain laws with which we are at present unacquainted disembodied spirits would manifest themselves, and even influence the affairs of this world. Maude listened, at first in wonder only; but afterwards with interest and curiosity to these wild dreams of the young surgeon—if, indeed, they were wild dreams. By and bye, she felt a yearning to know more—to enter, herself on these fascinating, dangerous confines. She had a marvellous aptitude in learning; and another theory or hypothesis of his set her

to studying works on electricity and galvanism. David Luton talked frequently of what he called the "vital force." This he declared to be identical with what scientific men called electricity and spoke of as a "current," and so forth. He contended that the brain and nervous system formed a living electrical machine, or galvanic apparatus—that the electricity generated was the connecting link between the ethereal, but still material mind, and grosser body; and that the failure of the vital force—that is to say, decay and old age—was caused by the failure of electrical power. As a corollary to this, he argued triumphantly, that when electricity or galvanism should be sufficiently under control to be supplied at will to the great nervous centre, then decay could be indefinitely postponed, and life prolonged till accident or violence should cut it short.

Maude listened to all this with rapt attention, and from the moment in which her interest was aroused, she commenced with marvellous aptitude, not to learn, exactly, but rather to pick up a knowledge of scientific subjects. David talked to her with perfect freedom about many cases in his practice, described the symptoms, gave his opinion, and told her his mode of treatment and the *rationale* thereof; to all of which Maude listened with grave interest. As she was marvellously quick and apt, she soon acquired a knowledge of drugs, their uses, effects, and the proper doses.

It was in this singular school that her character developed itself. At the time of her uncle's death her mind was all but a blank—the shock had for the time obliterated all else—and, like a dry sponge, she sucked up what was thus strangely presented to her. Perhaps it would have been

better for her, had she not so firmly determined to postpone for a month the subject suggested by her uncle's last words. As it was, a singular sympathy grew up between David and herself. It was quite unlike the relationship of a young man to a beautiful young girl—quite unlike that of cousin to cousin, or brother to sister; it resembled more closely than anything, that of an elder student to a younger one. She the younger one, however, rapidly gained ground. David noted with admiration and surprise some almost marvellous instances of rapidly-acquired knowledge she displayed; and not only that, but the power of reasoning logically thereon.

Every one knows, that as a rule, the reasoning faculty is almost entirely denied to women. They cannot reason; they never, or at least very seldom, do so—but feel, and act on their feelings. This is, perhaps, a very happy and providential arrangement, as it saves the fair sex a world of trouble and annoyance. A female accepts what she is told by those whom she is accustomed to look up to, implicitly, unquestioningly, and in blind faith.

Can any one imagine a woman, albeit the most learned and talented of her sex, as the author of the "*Mosaic Cosmogony*," one of the celebrated writers of *Essays and Reviews*? Or, can any one imagine a female *Metaphysician*—or even *Philosopher*, in the higher sense of the word? No; woman can learn and adapt, but it is not in their nature to originate, or to reason logically from given premises.

A month passed away, and things at the house at Cumberford had settled down into an every-day routine. There was breakfast at half-past eight; then Tom Hopton

and David would start on their first round, and be back to lunch, usually, by about half-past twelve. Then again they were in the saddle on another and longer round, from which they did not return till seven. And then at eight one of them by turns would go out on foot, and see the patients in the village and immediate neighbourhood. It was hard work, but, till another assistant came unavoidable.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PROPHECY FULFILLED.

ONE day, about five weeks after the funeral, Maude was sitting in the little room she called the drawing-room, buried in thought, when she heard a voice in the passage. As she knew no stranger would come that way, she thought it was David, or Mr. Hopton, speaking to the servants as he passed into the surgery. She was at that moment thinking of Molly Rumble; and having made up her mind to visit her next day, had anticipated in imagination what the old woman would reveal. Her fancy took a very wild flight indeed, but it is unnecessary here to chronicle particulars. Suddenly, she started at the sound of a man's voice—she had not heard him approach; and a faint cry broke from her lips as she saw a gentleman standing in the doorway between the two rooms.

“Well, young lady; my prophecy has come true, you see. We have met again.”

Instantly, she recognized the voice and features of her companion in the train. Colouring scarlet and much confused, she knew not why, she rose to her feet; but glancing in his face, she saw there what she thought to be a mocking, supercilious smile. This angered her, and at once restored her self-possession.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, coldly; "do you require anything? Mr. Luton is not at home."

"Oh! I am sorry for that. If you will permit me, I will wait his arrival."

"Do you wish to see him professionally?" she replied, in a still more freezing tone; "because, if so, I ought to tell you that he will not be back till seven o'clock."

"No, I don't wish to see him professionally, I am happy to say."

"I presume you do not require my presence, sir. I will send the servant to you." And so saying, she moved slowly towards the door—he of course making way, still, however, with that provoking smile on his face.

"I beg your pardon Miss Luton," he said; "I see you mistake me."

How did he know my name, she thought indignantly. I suppose the fellow has had me watched.

However, he went on, and she could not help listening—

"I believe I was expected by David Luton; I said in my letter, to-day or to-morrow."

A sudden light broke in upon Maude. "You are not Mr. Davenport, are you?"

"My name is Sydney Davenport, at your service."

"I beg your pardon ten thousand times," she said, running forward, now all cordiality, and offering her hand. "They have often talked to me about you—David and Tom Hopton. I am so glad to see you, though we are stran—no, not quite strangers," she interrupted, and blushing a little. "I remember you perfectly well; and it was that which made me so angry."

"Ah! you are thinking of our meeting in the train,

and wondering how I could have known you, and your history."

"Yes, indeed; that has always been a mystery. At one time I was actually foolish enough to believe, to some extent, the nonsense you talked of—your power of reading character, and so on."

"But suppose it is not nonsense?"

"But it is nonsense, she persisted. Besides you confessed your own failure—you acknowledged that you could not read me."

No, no—not entirely; I only said that your eyes puzzled me."

"Well Sir, and what do you think of them now? Do they still puzzle you?"

"As to my opinion of them, I think them very beautiful eyes."

"I don't want flattery, and I hate flatterers. Besides I know they are beautiful eyes, and it is quite superfluous on your part to tell me so."

"This is a most singular young lady, an extraordinary girl," thought Davenport to himself. But he only laughed and said aloud—

"Really you are very candid; it is quite refreshing, I declare, to find some one who dare to speak their thoughts. It is getting cooler, now," he added, looking out at window. "What do you say if we stroll down to the river? That used to be a very favourite walk of mine. If you will trust yourself to my escort, we can improve our acquaintance, and enjoy the beauties of nature."

"I will go and put on my hat and shawl," she said, simply; "I shall not detain you a moment."

"Really, a most charming girl," Davenport said to himself. "I think she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen; there is a piquancy and freshness in her manner quite charming. So perfectly at her ease too; so lady-like and graceful in every movement and gesture. Upon my soul, she would grace a very high station, this girl—this simple surgeon's niece." He seated himself, and was pursuing this train of thought when her clear voice summoned him—

"Come, Sir Laggard, I am ready, and awaiting you." She was standing at the door, and he coloured up just a little as the thought struck him that she had been indulging in a good stare without his knowledge.

They strolled together down the well-remembered path along which Tom Hopton had taken her on the day of her arrival at Cumberford. As they came to this gentleman's favourite fishing nook, and saw the punt moored there as before, a gentle sadness stole over her face. She remembered how she was summoned from this quiet spot to find her uncle and guardian mortally injured. The first bitter poignancy of grief had worn off, as it always does with time; and now, when she thought of the good doctor, it was with a chastened, mournful sorrow—by no means all pain. It was when her thoughts went back to his last words—those mysterious words in which he spoke of her in connection with Holford Hall—that she felt troubled and uneasy. On these occasions a strange expression would come over her face, her brow be slightly knit, while her eyes, those eyes so incomprehensible to Davenport, would gleam with a peculiar fire. Unconsciously as they stood together by the side of the quiet little river, the



delight of Tom Hopton, her thoughts did so fly back; and Davenport, looking at her face, was startled and surprised by the said mysterious expression.

"You are thinking of something unpleasant?" he said, interrogatively; "at least I am physiognomist enough to be sure of that."

She started, and in some little confusion answered quickly—"Yes; no; that is to say, I scarcely know. I was thinking of the future."

"Of your own future? Surely that cannot be so gloomy a prospect. Young, beautiful, accomplished—your path in life should be strewn with roses."

"I know not. I cannot tell. I have objects and aims, and rights to assert, of which you know nothing. At present I am wandering in the dark. In a few days I shall know more. How far is it to Holford turnpike?"

"About five miles. Are you going there?"

"Yes; I shall go to-morrow or next day; I wish to see and talk to the old woman who keeps it. She nursed me when a child."

"And you wish to have a gossip with the old woman, I suppose?"

"Gossip! No! I wish to talk to her. Strange as it may seem to you, on that old woman hangs my future fate. She knows that which will powerfully influence the course of my life—the secret of my birth, and other mysteries."

Davenport looked at her in the utmost surprise. "Secret of her birth; influence her future fate! Is the girl mad, or only wildly romantic? What secret should there be about her birth? I knew she was Dr. Luton's niece; and

as her name was Luton, I supposed she was the daughter of a brother. Now I think of it, I have never heard her father mentioned. That is certainly a little strange." Looking in the beautiful pale face of Maude, he could discern there no signs of wildness or excitement.

"She is perfectly serious and collected," he thought. "She evidently means what she says. A most extraordinary girl!"

On their return to the house they found that David Luton and Tom Hopton had returned. The young surgeon and the assistant warmly greeted their old pupil.

"I am glad to see you have struck up an acquaintance with Maude," said David, pleasantly. "I fear it is very dull for her; but, you see, it is impossible for me to help it. I am obliged to be away nearly all day."

"O! Mr. Davenport and I have met before."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; on the day I came, he travelled in the same carriage with me from Reading to Didcot. I don't know how it happened, but we got into conversation. It seems he knew me, for he quite frightened me by telling my fortune, gipsy-like, and prophesying that we should meet again."

"Sydney always was fond of the marvellous; I mean, appearing to be marvellous in the character of soothsayer, astrologer, or something of the sort. He prides himself on being a judge of character too."

"At all events," said Maude, laughing, "I defeated him. He owned he could not make me out, and had the audacity to blame what he called my mysterious eyes."

"Now I think of it, Maude, you have a very strange expression in your eyes sometimes, especially when your mind goes wool-gathering."

"O, yes; I know all about that. But it was not of my fits of abstraction Mr. Davenport was speaking. He declares that there is a constant, wild, unsettled expression in these unfortunate eyes of mine. I suppose if he were not too polite he would say a *mad* look." "Somehow no one liked the word—it is a disagreeable word; and a silence followed, which was broken by Maude ringing and ordering tea.

"Now, Sydney," said Tom Hopton, presently, "what about that farm-house fishing I wrote to you of? I know you are too restless to stop without some greater attraction than we have at Cumberford. I am going close to Fairford to-morrow. Will you come over, and arrange? I know it would suit you; pretty place, good fishing, three daughters, two children—but one sixteen or seventeen, and a fine girl; so you can vary trout-fishing with flirtation."

"Yes, I'll come over with you to-morrow, willingly."

"Does the road lead through the Holford turnpike?" asked Maude.

"Yes; we shall have to pass through it, and be tolled accordingly."

"I want to call there and have a talk with old Molly Rumble; you know, David, the old woman who nursed me?"

"Yes, I know; a strange kind of creature it is too, and full of gossip as an egg of meat. She's always trying to detain me to spin some wondrous yarn or other. She hints

and babbles about family secrets. I pay no attention to her. I have a great dislike to gossiping old women, possibly because I have to endure so much in that way in the course of my practice."

"Does she ever talk of me?" asked Maude, an eager look coming over her face.

"Really, I can hardly say; I think I have heard her mention your name. But Holford Hall is her great theme. She has been employed there several times when there has been sickness about. I believe the fortunate young lady, Miss De Vere, is delicate, and has required in her youth unceasing attention. By-the-way, her name is Maude—the same as yours. This is rather strange, is it not?" Miss Luton thought it was rather strange, and forthwith plunged into a labyrinth of thought.

"Of whom does the family consist at the Hall?" asked Davenport. "I heard some fellows talking of the heiress the other day in town. I understand it is an immense property, and that she inherits the whole in her own right."

"Every acre," replied David Luton. "The splendid property is curiously entailed on the first-born of the possessor; whether son or daughter. So Miss Maude de Vere is undisputed heiress of a domain certainly worth fifteen thousand a year."

"Fifteen thousand a year!" exclaimed Tom Hopton, in innocent astonishment. "By Jove! Whatever can she do with it, or with herself either! If I was worth fifteen thousand a year I should be afraid to move about. Whatever can a girl like that do with it! We've never attended her have we?"

"No; they always send for Dr. Acton, of Oxford, up at

the Hall, if it's only for a scratched finger." Then, in answer to Davenport's question, he said "The family consists only of Miss De Vere and her grandmother, who is also one of her guardians. They say the old woman hates the heiress, as she stands in the way of her favourite son, brother of Stanton De Vere, who was supposed to be shot accidentally, though people do say it was a deliberate case of *felo de se*. This younger son of the old lady is now it appears, a colonel in India, and has nothing but his pay; nor can his mother leave him anything, as she has nothing but her jointure and the right to live at the Hall. Under these circumstances, I hear that the heiress and her grandmother hold but little communication with each other. Once a year the other guardian, an aged solicitor in London, comes down to see his ward and look after the estate, receive the rents, and so on. On the whole I believe the girl is very much neglected. She has had the most expensive masters, of course, and I believe is now finishing her education in a fashionable school on the continent. From what I hear, though very handsome, she is not particularly bright. In fact people do say that her mind is marvellously weak and unformed, for her age."

"What is her age now?" asked Maude.

"I don't know exactly; about sixteen, I think."

"And she is at school in France?"

"I can't say whether she is now; but I heard that she was. We doctors" he added, turning to Davenport, "can't help hearing a great deal of gossip."

"It has its advantages though," replied Sydney.  
"For my part I must own to womanish curiosity."

I like to hear all about the histories of my neighbours."

"Then if such is your taste, you have only to buy a country practice. You know you have passed, and put M. R. C. S. after your name. I will guarantee that you will be thoroughly surfeited with small talk and scandal in a month."

"Perhaps so," was the careless reply. "But, how about to-morrow? Tom Hopton here talks about taking me over to his farm-house fishery, and Miss Luton is desirous of calling at the turnpike. How is it to be managed?"

"Easily enough," replied David. "Take the little brougham. It only holds two inside; but then, one can ride on the box."

"O! I'll ride on the box," cried Hopton at once; "I don't mind a bit."

"Then we will consider that settled," said Davenport turning to Maude; "we will put you down at the turnpike and call for you as we come back."

"Yes; that seems to me a very good arrangement," she replied. "At what hour shall we start to-morrow?"

"O, after my morning round," said Hopton; "just a bit of lunch and off we go."

After the evening meal, Davenport strolled out to smoke a cigar. Hopton went to the surgery to make up medicine while David remained with Maude, and soon got on one of his favourite subjects. Presently Davenport returned, having finished his cigar. David Luton was in full swing, enthusiastically holding forth to Maude on one of his favourite speculations. Sydney took a seat, and for a while listened in silence.

"Who shall deny that mind and matter are not synonymous—that mind or soul is merely an etherealised species of matter? the very closeness of the connection proves it. See here," said David, producing a small packet, "this is a drug called *Cannabis Indica*, or Indian hemp. If mind were not matter, I contend that it would be impossible to produce an effect on it by a material agent such as this drug. But what is the fact? I administer a few grains. Behold the effect! The mind, the soul—call it what you will—is straightway thrown into a sort of ecstasy. The faculty of imagination is stimulated—the most gorgeous images present themselves—wild fantastic visions arise—a delightful intoxication quickly supervenes; the most singular and life-like delusions and dreams, which have all the semblance of reality, pass through the mind. For the time being the subject of the experiment is in another world—in a world in which all is light, exhilaration, and joy. The wings of ambition soar aloft unchecked; the penniless wretch is for a time a crowned Emperor—the poor servant girl a queen of beauty and fashion. On some the effect is very singular, and closely resembles madness; but all agree that the sensations are most pleasurable. All these results, you see, are effected on the mind, or soul, by a small quantity of this hemp. If the mind were not material, I argue that a material agent could not affect it."

"Let me see this curious drug?" said Maude, holding forth her hand, into which David at once placed the little packet.

"Strange," she said, "that a little of this harmless-looking substance should produce such marvellous effects. How much is a sufficient dose?"

"O, a grain or two—as much as would lie on the point of a penknife."

"And is it dangerous?"

"A large quantity would prove fatal; but in small doses I don't know that it does any harm."

"And what is your opinion on this subject, Mr. Davenport?" Maude asked.

"On what subject?"

"On what David has been discoursing so learnedly—on the identity of mind and matter?"

"I think," he replied, coldly, "that is far above ordinary comprehension, and that it is idle to gossip and talk loosely about such deeply abstruse things; least of all do I think it a proper theme for a lady to enter into."

"You do not think that women should meddle with scientific subjects?"

"I do not."

"You do not think, I suppose, that the female intellect is sufficiently powerful to comprehend such matters?"

"I do not; and I should be sorry to suppose women could think and argue like philosophers. It seems to me that in dealing, or attempting to deal with that which is above them, they unsex themselves, and forfeit their claims to woman's greatest graces and highest qualities—gentleness and innocent purity."

Sydney Davenport rose at the conclusion of this speech, and strolled out. He did not notice how Maude Luton's cheeks flushed, nor see the angry glitter of her eyes.

"Insolent?" she cried pettishly, when he had gone.  
"Your friend is the rudest, the most insulting man I ever



met in my life." Maude was genuinely angry ; but David only laughed slightly, and said—

"Sydney Davenport is a very good fellow ; but he has strange notions ; and invariably speaks out in the most blunt and straightforward manner."

"I shall not forget his insolence easily," said Maude, quite in a little fever of anger. "The idea of his telling me that I unsexed myself, and forfeited my claims to woman's greatest graces and highest qualities. As if I were a child, and had no right to take interest in aught but childish things."

"Perhaps he will buy you a doll," said David, laughing again. Perfectly good-natured, and almost incapable of anger himself, he by no means realized how furious his passionate-natured cousin was.

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## CHAPTER X.

## MAUDE CONFIDES IN HER COUSIN.

We have already said that Maude had mentally resolved she would not think of her own affairs nor take any steps until a certain interval had elapsed after the death of her uncle. The time had expired on the very day Sydney Davenport had arrived. So when Maude's anger had somewhat cooled down, she spoke to her cousin about her future course.

They were sitting alone in the little room she called her drawing-room—at least she was, for he had drawn his chair half out of the window. The young surgeon, having first asked permission with scrupulous politeness from his cousin, was smoking a cigar. This day's work had happened to be unusually light; and David, who was pale and thin from the overwork of the last month, thoroughly appreciated the enjoyment of a quiet evening. Tom Hopton and Davenport had gone off to the river together; the former having tempted Sydney by glowing tales of some big chub under the boughs to be caught by a fly-line.

Maude looked silently at her cousin for some little time as he sat in the evening sun, a pleasant breeze just stirring his hair. It was then that the idea first presented itself to her, that though pale and thin, he was very handsome. His beauty of feature was strictly of an intellectual character; perhaps there was too much of the dreamer, not

enough of the healthful human animal, in the expression of the features. Involuntarily she compared him in her mind with his friend Sydney Davenport, and formed a vague impression of the character and qualities, mental and physical, of each.

"David has a susceptible nature, he is enthusiastic," she said to herself. "His intellect is of a high order. He has the materials of a great philosopher, but in the race of life always putting on one side duty (David would always do his duty), I would rather prophesy success and eminence to such a man as this Davenport, whom I hate for his insolence; and I mean to let him feel it too, some day. He is strong, physically as well as mentally—vigorous limbed as vigorous minded. He is handsome, too; I cannot deny that; and he is not affected. I believe his intellect is not equal to David's. I don't think he cares for science, or abstruse difficult questions; and I don't believe he has the least interest in the question my cousin discoursed on so eloquently the other night, as to whether or no the moon was inhabited. No, I am sure he has not; but though his fancy does not soar out into space—though he does not seek to penetrate into the mysteries of the planetary system, or discuss the plurality of worlds, yet I am sure he is fitted to command on this globe of ours. Not a philosopher, or a dreamer, or an enthusiast, or a metaphysician, but a master spirit among his fellow-men, fitted to seize power and hold sway; to be a dictator, tribune, emperor, autocrat! Ah! if he had lived in a past age, I feel sure Sydney Davenport would have been heard of—would have left his name and fame behind him. And yet, I don't like him; I won't like him—and I won't

be afraid of him ; nor will I allow him to treat me as a child, a school-girl." Maude forgot that she had only left school a week or two, and purposed going again, in order to pursue her studies, for she refused to consider her education complete.

"Why, Maude," exclaimed David, presently, having finished his cigar, "What on earth are you thinking of? You are quite in a brown study."

"Well, to tell you the truth," she replied, "I was trying my skill at divination."

"Divination?"

"Yes ; you know how your friend Mr. Davenport prides himself on being able to read character. Well, I was just doing the same, and 'casting his horoscope.' I don't suppose that is the correct expression, but it sounds mysterious and magical."

"Well, and what result did you arrive at?" he asked, smiling, and with no particular curiosity.

"I tell you what, cousin, I will make a bargain with you. You will tell me your thoughts, and I will tell you mine?"

"With all my heart," he said good-naturedly, "I am agreed."

"Well, then," she said, "I was thinking of this said Mr. Davenport—for goodness sake, don't tell him, he would be vain)—and trying to sketch out his character and disposition."

"Well, let us hear the result?" Then she confided to him much of what the reader already knows, only in different words ; of course, she toned it down a little, and avoided comparisons.

"Well, and now what were you thinking of, cousin David?"

"Well, Maude," he said, "to tell you the truth, I was thinking of you."

"Indeed, I feel honoured; go on."

"I was looking at you, and all at once the thought came to me. What a beautiful girl Maude Luton is."

She blushed at this—not at the compliment, but the memory that she herself had, strangely enough, then first observed that her cousin was handsome.

"Now, don't flatter me, David."

"Indeed, I don't mean to flatter you. Besides I believe you are a sort of girl to whom flattery could do no harm. But such were really my thoughts. I knew you were accomplished, and clever, and good, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Ah," Maude thought to herself, "I don't know so much about that latter; sometimes I feel afraid to look into my own heart."

"But until to-day it never struck me that you were a beautiful young woman. Indeed, so far as I can see, not that I pretend to be a judge, you are faultless in shape and feature." This was said with such utter innocence as to cause Maude to laugh outright. David had no thought of flattering her, or pleasing her; but in his simple way he just told her in plain words the impression she had made on him.

"Indeed it's true, Maude," he added, quite earnestly. "Never till this evening, has the knowledge come to me that you are a beautiful young lady—a woman in fact; and that some one or other, perhaps several, will be falling

in love with you, and wanting to marry you. I should be sorry for that, you know. I suppose it is selfish of me now, but I cannot bear the idea of any female friend of mine being married. You know you are the only relation I have in the world. You and I, Maude, are alone. If ever you do marry, I hope it will be some one about here."

"Some bumpkin farmer, I suppose. Truly you are considerate ; it is scarcely a minute since you told me I was absolute perfection."

"Well, and can't absolute perfection content itself with a quiet, happy country life?"

"But suppose to absolute perfection of mind and body I have superadded a certain amount of ambition—perhaps a great deal, and desire to grace a high station, which my beauty and accomplishments and all that sort of thing so well fit me for, David."

"Ambition, ambition," he said vaguely. "Ah, yes ; it is a word commonly used ; but to tell you the truth, I never could understand it in the sense that some do. I have ambition, I suppose ; I wish to do my duty—to live a quiet, happy life, and die loved and respected by all, like my dear father, God rest his soul. I have a strong desire to penetrate some of the mysteries which our ignorance conceals from us. I believe that all the secrets of nature and science, of life and death, are to be grasped and understood, if only the man shall arise with an intellect and opportunity sufficient. I suppose that is ambition. But as to the insane desire for glory, conquest, and so on, such as that of Alexander, who wept, poor fool, because there was no other world to conquer, I call it madness, the result of vanity and self-conceit."

"Ah, well, cousin," said Maude, rather wearily, "do not let us discuss the point."

"I say, Maude," he broke out suddenly, after a short pause, "what a capital thing it would be if Sydney Davenport were to fall in love with you!"

"Indeed!" she said, scornfully. "I cannot see it. For my part he need not take the trouble to make such a fool of himself."

"Why, what have you to say against him? He is rich generous, good-looking, brave, and honourable. What more should a man be?"

"I dare say he is all you state, cousin; but really it is a matter of indifference to me. I don't like him."

"Not like him! Not like Sydney Davenport!" he exclaimed, in unfeigned astonishment. "Why, what have you to say against him? He's the best fellow in the world—good-hearted, good-tempered, a right down honest and honourable English gentleman."

"But does it never occur to you, cousin David, that though he may be all this, that I don't care for him, or to put it in another shape, that I might even aspire higher."

"Well, no; I can't say it ever did occur to me. You see, all my life I have looked on myself as the son of a country surgeon, and have never had a wish to lead any other life than that which my father did before me. And of you I have always thought as the niece of a country surgeon, perhaps just a grade higher than the gentleman farmer, as a professional man. It was only to-day it struck me you are beautiful. I can't make you out, Maude. It is incomprehensible to me, your disliking Sydney. Of

course, if he is disagreeable to you, I will contrive he shall shorten his visit. He is my friend, and my father's; but I shall not forget the words my father spoke to me concerning you. Shortly before he died, talking about the management of the house, and so on, he said that of course you would make this your home—as it is indeed by right. 'David, my boy,' he said, 'always remember that a true gentleman always considers a lady before himself. So long as Maude is here, consider her first, yourself and other things afterwards.' So, Maude, you have only to express a wish, and it shall be attended to. It is not likely I should fail to act on my father's words. Of course it will be unpleasant; but I shall consider it my duty to speak to Sydney, and tell him that unfortunately——"

She interrupted him abruptly, and rising, leaned her arms on his shoulder, and softly kissed his forehead.

"You dear, good-natured, but stupid cousin David, you must not pay so much attention to every silly, pettish word I let fall. I was annoyed and angry with Mr. Davenport, I own; but I do not dislike him so much as my words seem to have made you think. Don't dream of saying anything to him on the subject. Indeed, I will even try to like him, to please you."

"You certainly are a strange girl, Maude; but I suppose it is partly my own fault. I am, as you say, very stupid, and take everything in a matter-of-fact sort of way."

"And now, David, that I have made my peace with you on that subject, I want to talk to you about myself. You know I must shortly be doing something; that is to say, completing my education—qualifying myself for the profes-



sion, or I should say occupation, for which I have been intended."

David's face suddenly assumed an aspect of blank dismay. "But, Maude, I thought that was all done with, now that my father has left us; I thought it was understood that this was to be your home—that you were going to live here and keep house, until you were married, at all events."

She shook her head gravely, and replied quietly, but firmly—"It cannot be so. I have forborne to speak of it hitherto, out of respect to my uncle's memory. I must complete my education. You forget, David, that I am still very young, only eighteen."

"But you have the sense and self-possession of a woman ten years older. Surely you are no longer a child—will not go back to a school."

"Not exactly to a school, perhaps. At all events, I am determined to qualify myself to earn my living; and not as a second-rate English governess, but as a highly accomplished one, acquainted with foreign languages; certainly French and Italian, perhaps German, and able to speak fluently, and with faultless accent. Now, this I can never acquire in England. Two years in a French convent, or a school, would effect this. It was only this afternoon you were saying that the great heiress, Miss De Vere, was completing her education abroad. Now-a-days, one is not accomplished, even highly educated, without a thorough knowledge, at least, of French. And it is not only the language, David; residence abroad gives one an insight into foreign manners and customs—makes one *au fait*, and removes all trace of that distressing and disfiguring

*mauvaise honte* for which so many English girls are conspicuous."

"Well, Maude, I suppose you know best; though why you should devote yourself to a life of toil and trouble, or even qualify yourself for it, I can't see."

"Now, David, before I tell you of what I am thinking, I want to ask you a few questions. First, do you know anything of me—I mean of my father?"

"Maude, I know next to nothing. I know that he was a bad man, for he deserted your mother after marrying her. My father seldom or never spoke to me on the subject; he seemed shy and delicate about it, so I never pressed him."

"You do not even know the name of my father?"

"I have not the slightest idea. I fancy the doctor guessed, but he never confided it to me. Once he said to me, when your name was brought up in conversation, 'Ah, poor girl, she is indeed unfortunate; her mother dead, hurried to her grave by the heartlessness of a bad husband, and she herself left to the care of one so incapable of supplying a mother's place as myself. I will do my best to be a father to her; and you see that you are a brother, David. She bears our name. As to that of her father—ah! well, don't let us talk of it; I never wish to hear the subject mentioned.' That was the most my father ever said to me."

"But you are sure my mother was married to my father?" Maude asked. And now she leant forward, and waited with bated breath and eager look for his reply.

"Quite sure," he replied, confidently.

"How could you be sure?" she asked.

"Because my father said so positively; and he was incapable of falsehood."

Again David's simple, honest nature, appeared to the best advantage; and Maude could not help admiring him as he answered, with sublime and innocent confidence, "because my father said so."

"Thank you, dear cousin," Maude replied—and from that moment felt a tenderer regard for David than she had ever done before. Gradually his sterling merit and perfect guilelessness were unfolding themselves to her, and she slowly became aware that the young surgeon was a worthy successor of his father.

"And now, David," she said, "we will dismiss the past, and talk about the future. I have scarcely had time to decide yet on what I shall do. I propose to go abroad, and study. When I have decided as to details, where I shall go and all that, will you take charge of money affairs for me?"

"I will, Maude. I can answer for it your interests shall not suffer in my hands. You have, you know, two thousand five hundred pounds of your own. I can easily spare you another thousand, or even two."

"Thank you, I know you would, my dear David; but I do not think I shall require it. I propose to spend the odd five hundred, on my education, outfit, and travelling expenses, for two years—that is, if you will let me; for you know I am not of age, and you are my guardian—at least, if not legally so, you are to all intents and purposes."

"Maude, you can do whatever you think best—can have any money you require. I have every confidence in

your judgment. I know you are a clever girl, and dare say, that though what you propose is disagreeable, it is for the best. So when you tell me that you have made up your mind, I will do anything in my power. You don't think of leaving here for a long time yet, I hope?"

"I scarcely know; so much depends on to-morrow."

"On to-morrow! How? I don't understand you."

"On my interview with Molly Rumble," she replied, shortly.

"I really can't understand you."

"It is too long a tale to tell now, David; but believe me that I look forward, with hope and dread mingled, to seeing that old woman. I long earnestly to hear what she has to say."

"O! she will have plenty to say, never fear; but as to what value is to be attached to her gossip, that is another question."

"David," said Maude, rising, and laying her hand on his arm, "I do not mind confiding in you my belief that I have a destiny to fulfil; that I have been wronged—that I now suffer under grievous wrong; that there has been a combination, almost a conspiracy, against me. But they cannot, they shall not, keep me from my rights!"

Her manner was so wild and excited as she said this, that her cousin really felt a little alarmed. He looked in her face, and saw that it was flushed, and that her eyes sparkled with an uncertain, flickering fire. He said not a word aloud, however, but when he was alone he muttered—

"I don't like that talk about a 'conspiracy.' It always

excites in me a vague dread; I have seen so many cases in which a delusion of the kind has been the commencement of the failure of the mind—of insanity. But surely it cannot be so with her. No, no; I will drive away the thought. I remember now some disjointed words my poor father let fall ere he died, about Maude, and Holford Hall. He said she was 'heiress of Holford Hall.' I could not understand him, nor do I; but there *might* have been something in his words. A 'conspiracy' though! I don't like the word, nor her manner."

It will be readily seen that, to David Luton, his beautiful cousin, with her wild, passionate, enthusiastic nature, was quite an enigma.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## MAUDE RESOLVES TO OBTAIN HER RIGHTS.

THAT Maude Luton believed herself deeply wronged, and chafed and pined bitterly from the sense of that wrong, there was no doubt. The insulting words of Dolly Clarke had first called her attention seriously to her own history. What she had since learned, or fancied she had learned, of herself from Dr. Luton; had produced a singular effect on her excitable temperament. She had not only been made a mark for scorn—taunted with the fact of her being unknown, an outcast, a girl who could not claim a paternal family; but more than this, she had been robbed and defrauded of her right. Was not Stanton de Vere her father? And though he was treacherous and wicked enough to keep secret his marriage with her mother, was she not his heiress? and was not the splendid domain of Holford Lees hers by right? Undoubtedly this was so. Maude Luton felt perfectly certain on the point. The broken disjointed words spoken by her uncle, when near his end and perhaps prompted by the last delirium, were to her mind convincing proof. She never had the slightest misgiving on the subject. She was the disowned, wronged daughter of Stanton de Vere—rightful heiress of Holford Hall; and it was her duty, she thought, for her own sake, and to vindicate the memory of her mother, to assert her claim.

As to how this was to be done, she had scarcely thought

at all. Wholly inexperienced in the ways of the world, she did not anticipate any great difficulty. She felt assured that she was right, and that to her sanguine temperament was all-sufficient. The rest would follow.

At this period Maude Luton was perfectly innocent—incapable of guile. She would secure her rights, but openly and fairly. How to set about it she thought she would decide on when she had got all the information she could from the old woman Molly Rumble. No shadow or thought of anything underhand or wrong crossed her mind. Could it have been possible to convince her she was wrong in her surmise, she would have relinquished this strange design—if a design it could be called, so vague and shapeless. But it was impossible, without altering her very nature. Day by day, ever since the death of Dr. Luton, the feeling that she was wronged, and must assert her right had been deepening upon her, till now it held absolute sway in her mind ; amounted, indeed, almost to a monomania. For half an hour at a time she would sit at her chamber-window and gaze out over Holford Lees to the Hall, which could just be seen through the old oaks and chestnuts which surrounded it.

Mingled with the predominant feeling of burning indignation at the supposed wrong done her, which held sway in her breast, there was another. Maude was beautiful, elegant, accomplished ; and she knew it. She was by no means wanting in a something which, though it was not exactly ambition, was of a similar nature. She did not sigh for power, or the right to command, nor had she any wish for her name and fame to be world-known : still she knew that she was qualified by nature and education to take

her place in higher society than that which she could hope to meet as a poor surgeon's niece. She was not insensible to the attractions of wealth. She would like to dress well, to wear beautiful jewels ; she sighed for a carriage, and a pair of darling little ponies ; saddle-horses, too. She had taken riding lessons, and was a good horsewoman. She would like too, a beautiful house to live in, with large lawn, fringed with shrubs and studded with flower-beds ; a park in which beautiful mottled deer frisked and gambolled ; a grand old avenue of trees ; meadows with a pleasant path running through them down to a silvery stream or little lake, on the banks of which was an elegant boat-house, with pleasure-boats therein ; a box at the opera, too, (for, herself a skilful musician, she was passionately fond of music) ; flowers all the year round (another strong *penchant* of hers) ; the ability to travel about when she pleased, and in good style. These things and all the luxuries which wealth can purchase, Maude Luton thoroughly appreciated ; and though it could not be said she coveted the power to enjoy them ; yet it is certain she would have gladly found herself in possession thereof ; and the more so because she thought it her right she should.

And now behold the eventful day to which the young lady had so long looked forward—the day on which she has persuaded herself she is to learn her own history from the old nurse, Molly Rumble. Maude's anger against Mr. Sydney Davenport had had time to cool considerably by the following afternoon. Besides, too, her cousin's words and anxious solicitude for herself had not been without effect. She would indeed be unkind and ungrateful, she said to herself, if she were to be ruled by David's friend



and drive him from the house. So she smiled graciously on the visitor next day, and in her manner there was little or no trace of the resentment she had felt.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the pretty little brougham drew up at the gate, and Tom Hopton and Davenport standing there only awaited the young lady. She came down presently; and as she walked across the little garden and stood talking for a minute or two to one of the servants, who ran out after her for some direction or other concerning household affairs, Mr. Sydney Davenport leisurely surveyed her, and could not help acknowledging that her appearance was as nearly faultless as possible.

In mourning, she wore a black silk dress, fitting close to her figure and coming high up to the neck, which was encircled by the tiniest of linen collars. A black bonnet with veil thrown back was chosen with admirable taste to suit the shape of her head, and was just worn far back enough to allow the whole of the profile of her beautiful face to be seen. A black-lace shawl completed her attire; and Sydney, regarding the whole effect, thought that she could not have dressed better or more becomingly had she the whole wealth of the Indies at command. It was not altogether the dress, simple and elegant in itself certainly, but the manner of wearing it. Some women have a talent in wearing anything, no matter how cheap or common, in a graceful way. Maude had this faculty to perfection, and indeed it was extended to her every action, her every movement. She gathered up her skirts and entered the brougham with queenly grace.

"This carriage is small, Mr. Davenport," she said; "I

hope my dress will not incommode you. I assure you I will squeeze it up into the smallest possible compass."

"Really, Miss Luton, you have nothing to apologise for," he said in reply. "I must say, I have never had the honour to ride in a carriage with a lady who was at once so well-dressed as yourself, and yet whose skirts were so little voluminous."

"Ah! you see I do not wear those horrid wire and cane affairs which are vulgarly and wrongly called 'crinoline.'"

"Indeed! then how do you manage?"

"Well, now, Mr. Davenport," she said, laughing, "that is really a very impertinent question, and worthy of you. Do you suppose I am going to initiate you into all the mysteries of my toilette—intrust you with secrets sacred from all but my lady's-maid, when I have one."

"I really beg your pardon," he said. "I did not think of what I was saying."

Maude now occupied herself with the prospect on either side. Cumberford lay in a little valley, so that from the village itself only a glimpse could be obtained of the surrounding country. But it was different when a hill about a mile from the place was surmounted; then the whole landscape lay spread out to the view. The hill was tolerably steep; so Maude and Davenport volunteered to get out and walk, Tom Hopton also dismounting from the box.

Arrived at the summit of this eminence, Maude Luton drew to one side of the road, and gazed delightedly out on the glorious English landscape. For miles and miles around there lay stretched out green meadows, bounded by hedges, and trees of darker hue; fields of waving corn in-

terspersed with coppices, little woods, and clumps of trees ; here and there, all over the broad expanse a few villages and numerous farm-houses. The turnpike road might be seen like a white line across ; and parish roads and bridle-paths helped to diversify the scene. Then there could be seen the stately, slow-flowing, silvery Thames winding in and out—now disappearing altogether, again coming into sight ; and also a smaller stream, which in the distance looked like a mere rivulet. Altogether the fertile plain, bathed in the afternoon sunlight, presented a picture truly enchanting, and of a kind to be seen nowhere out of England. Maude remained gazing as one spell-bound. Her eye wandered over the expanse of meadow and arable land ; away along by the clustering woods and villages, with their rustic churches and collections of corn-ricks around ; away by the side of the river, like a stream of silver drawn across the landscape ; up the slope which led to the park-gates, across the heavily-timbered park itself, till at last her gaze rested on the white stone mansion, surrounded with terraced gardens, sprinkled with vases and statuary, here and there a fountain playing—Holford Hall itself !

The brougham had reached the bottom of the hill, as had likewise Davenport and Hopton. The former had hurried back to see after her, and arrived panting at the top just as Maude, standing on a bank by the side of the road, was speaking some words to herself in impassioned excited tones. She did not see or hear him approach, and he was near enough to observe her every motion, and hear her words, before she was aware of his presence. With outstretched hand, she was pointing across the beautiful

landscape towards Holford Hall—or rather, her hand described a comprehensive sweep in the air, which seemed intended to take in everything. Her eyes shone with unwonted fire; and that flush was on her face which always came when she was at all excited.

“All mine!” she said aloud; “all mine! Meadow and field, hill and dale, farm-house, village and homestead, wood and coppice, park and grand mansion—all belong to me, the heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall! All mine!—all mine by right!”

Sydney Davenport heard her words in utter amazement, and suddenly a horrible suspicion darted across his mind.

“Mad!—mad! By heavens, the unhappy girl is mad!” he said to himself. “What can she mean by saying all this is hers—that she is the heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall? What extraordinary delusion is this?” He did not wait to think longer, but called to her, as he judged it would be unpleasant for her to discover him first.

As for Maude, she seemed perfectly fascinated with the view, and again and again her pleased gaze swept the landscape from the foot of the hill to Holford Hall.

“Miss Luton, are you coming? The brougham is waiting at the bottom for you.”

Instantly she came back to herself and the present, as it were. “I really beg pardon,” she said, turning from the gate by which she had been standing and coming towards him. “I was so charmed with this beautiful landscape that I quite forgot everything else,—yourself, Mr. Hopton, brougham—everything.”

To his astonishment, there was no trace of wildness or

excitement in her manner now. 'She seemed perfectly composed, and at her ease.

"I can't make her out," he thought, gazing curiously into her beautiful face, which had just the remains of the flush still upon it. "What could she have meant? She must be mad. I will ask her." "Miss Luton," he said aloud, "do you know you were talking to yourself just now—rhapsodising, in fact."

"Was I, indeed? Very likely. I have a bad habit of doing so, I know."

"Do you know what you were saying?"

"I really can't remember at this moment."

"I heard you: you were pointing to Holford Hall, and said distinctly, 'All belongs to me—the heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall. All mine—all mine!' These were your words; I heard them distinctly."

"Indeed," she said, quite carelessly; "I did not know you were so near. I must be more guarded, or I shall be revealing secrets some of these days."

"But what on earth did you mean, Miss Luton," he persisted, "by asserting that you were the heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall?"

She turned slowly towards him, looked him full in the face, her bright clear eyes meeting his unfalteringly. "What did I mean?" she said; "I mean what I said. I am the rightful heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall—of all this broad expanse of fertile land and yonder park and mansion. Ah! you may look astonished, but it is true."

He did indeed look astonished; more than astonished, —bewildered. Her words were so extravagant, and yet her manner so free from wildness.

"The heiress of Holford Hall!" he thought. "She must be mad! And yet she looks calm and self-possessed. She evidently believes what she says too."

Maud was the first to speak—"I don't wonder at your being surprised, Mr. Davenport, at all; but what I have told you I firmly believe to be—nay, more, I am sure it is, the truth! I will tell you all about it some day. Come now, don't look so blank; I will race you to the bottom of the hill." And without waiting for him, Maude, with a merry laugh, darted off and ran on down the somewhat steep incline. He watched her lithe graceful form, as with agile pace she bounded away, with admiration, not unmingled with something akin to dismay. Occasionally, as she ran on, the rapid motion and the wind combined slightly lifted the skirt of her dress, and revealed a foot and ankle faultless in shape. He followed slowly, watching her running till she disappeared round a turn in the road.

"Certainly the most beautiful girl I have ever met! And so accomplished and vivacious too. And to think that she is the subject of hallucinations—to think that she is little else than mad! No, no! it cannot be! I will not believe it. There must be some other way of explaining this strange fancy. Perhaps she is joking—making fun of me; and yet I don't think she is that sort of girl."

When he got to the bottom, he found that the brougham had gone on a little, and Miss Luton was waiting for him. She was obviously in high spirits; and advancing to meet him, placed her arm in his.

"Come now," she said, "don't look so blank and gloomy.

You seemed astonished at my words just now. I daresay you thought them very extravagant. But I assure you it is not so. I spoke the truth; but will tell you more about it some other day. Perhaps I may even ask your advice—if you behave yourself, and don't attempt to lecture me again," she added, suddenly remembering his not very politely-expressed disapprobation of her the evening before.

"I lecture you!" he said. "I don't know that ever I did."

"What have you forgotten? Do you not remember how rudely you expressed yourself last evening with respect to studies and habits of thought not suitable to females? Don't you remember you almost told me in plain words, 'I had unsexed myself, and forfeited the greatest claims,' &c., &c., and all because I listened to good clever David, and took interest in his theories and speculations?"

"Really, I had forgotten all about it," he said. "I am sorry if I spoke warmly, or offended you in any way. I fear I am too blunt in my speech habitually; especially when I feel interested."

Maude was now in an excellent temper, and freely forgave him the last night's sin; for which, at the time, she declared she hated him. "Very well," she said smiling; "I forgive you—only be a good boy, and don't do it again."

"Now then, you two!" cried Tom Hopton, who had run back to meet them. "Whatever are you up too? My patients won't thank you, I'll bet. Love-making, I suppose. Wonder you can't do that in the brougham

together, boxed up like a couple of turtle-doves. Phew! Isn't it jolly hot! Do come on, there's a good fellow; it's four o'clock. We shan't get to Black Ash Farm before half-past five, and I've twenty patients to see after that. Oh, you may laugh, Mr. Davenport, at a poor devil of a doctor's assistant, worked to death, not a minute to spare."

"Not even to catch a roach or a perch?" suggested Maude.

"And till you're as thin as a herring," put in Sydney, "You positively must be seen to, Tom. Why, man, you're absolutely wasting away."

"Oh, it's all very well to laugh at a fellow because he happens to be fat; but that's nothing to do with it, any how,—come on. I shall not be done before nine or ten to-night, and all through you, Mr. Sydney. Never mind, —I'll be even with you."

"Oh, dear no; it's not my fault, I assure you," replied Davenport. "I was delayed by going back for Miss Luton, whom I found on the top of the hill, leisurely—what shall I say? surveying her estates."

Maude laughed at this good-temperedly, somewhat to our friend's surprise, who thought to give her a hard rub.

"She's evidently serious—deadly serious. I can't make her out," he thought; "but I will—at least I'll try. If she's not mad, there must be some confounded mystery, about which I have never heard anything."

Half an hour's drive brought them to the turnpike on the Holford-road. Here Maude alighted, and the others went on, to call for her on their return, as by arrangement.



## CHAPTER XII.

## DAVENPORT SEEKS THE CLUE TO MAUDE'S HISTORY.

DAVENPORT first got inside the brougham again, after he had assisted his fair companion to alight. But he soon tired of this, and halloed to Tom Hopton to stop after about a hundred yards.

"What's the matter now?"

"Why, I'm going to ride outside—that's all."

"But there's only room for two, and hardly that. What can we do with this imp in livery?"

The "imp in livery" was the boy who helped to do the horses, and always drove the little brougham.

"Oh, he shall go inside. Jack, my lad, here's a big cigar for you! Jump in, smoke yourself sick, and fancy yourself a gentleman, if only for an hour." The lad grinned, touched his hat, took the cigar, got inside, and was probably driven for the first time in his life in that manner.

"I say, Tom, I want to talk to you."

"Well, blaze away, old boy. Keep a tight rein on the old horse—he shies a bit."

"I want to talk to you about Maude—Miss Luton, I mean."

"Well, you've been talking to her a jolly long time, and now you want to talk *about* her, do you?" said Tom, dryly. "Seems to me you're pretty considerably smitten, my young friend."

"Don't be a fool, Tom. I tell you I am serious."

"Very well; as I said before, blaze away. Wait till I've lit my pipe though; then I'm all attention." Mr. Hopton lit his pipe, and then composed himself gravely to listen.

"Well, look here," Davenport burst out—for he was at a loss how to begin. "Do you know anything about Miss Luton?"

"Well," replied Tom quietly, brushing the ash off his pipe, and putting it up. "I flatter myself I do. I was the only one left at home to receive her when she came. I entertained her at lunch, and then took her for a walk, and was teaching her how to catch perch—at least, you know, she was looking at me, and learning, I suppose—when—Oh, we won't talk about that! It was the day the accident happened to the poor doctor. Well, anyhow, of course, I know all about her. She is David's cousin, and a confoundedly handsome girl, and a clever girl too, I can tell you. Why, the other day I asked her to tell the English of a long French passage in one of our doctor's books—an extract, you know. Well, if she didn't rattle it off in English without stopping a moment, my name's not Tom Hopton. Then you should hear her play too! By Jove——"

"Confound it, that's not what I mean. Do you know anything about her history?"

"History!" replied Tom, opening his eyes. "Why, I didn't know she had any. It's only kings and emperors, Republics, nations, and so on, have histories. Maude Luton's history! Well, that's good certainly."

"I mean to say, do you know anything about her parentage—anything of her relations?"

"Parentage! relations! Why, she's Doctor Luton's niece, and David is her cousin. Isn't that enough?"

"Yes; but I am speaking of her parents."

"Oh, her mother! You mean the doctor's sister. She died years and years ago, when this girl was a baby."

"And her father?"

"Her father! Oh, I don't know anything about him."

"Don't know his name?—when he died?—anything?"

Tom fidgeted uneasily—partly because he was quite in a fog, and partly because he had a vague knowledge that at the late doctor's house the subject was an unpleasant one—a tabooed one.

"Well, now, the fact is, it has been always a subject that no one has ever talked about. I fancy he must have been a scamp, a loose fish, or something."

"Well—but his name? Was it Luton?"

"Well, now you ask me, I don't think it was. I fancy he must have deserted the doctor's sister, been unkind to her, or something. I know Miss Luton is the child of the doctor's sister."

"You're quite sure of that; I suppose then that the name of this man who married his sister being hateful, disagreeable to our poor friend, he resolved to adopt the girl, and give her his name?"

"Yes; that might have been it, but——" Tom here hesitated and stammered; and Sydney at once knew he wanted to say something, but scarcely knew how to say it.

"Well what is it, Tom?"

"Well, the fact is, I don't know whether I ought to tell you. David said something to me once. I don't know what made him."

"My dear boy, don't betray any confidence," interrupted Davenport, laying his hand on his arm; "far be it from me to pry into any family affairs, if there are reasons I should not—if David would not like it."

"Oh, but I may tell you. I remember now David said to me you are the best fellow in the world, and I never need have any secret from you."

"Very kind of him, I'm sure. Well, if you may tell me, go on."

"Well, from what David said, I don't think they were certain of her father's name—at least David didn't know. The doctor told him he feared he was a bad man, and died a bad man's death."

Sydney Davenport became suddenly grave, and thought deeply for some time. "His saying that he died the death of a bad man implied that Dr. Luton knew him—most decidedly," he said after a pause.

"Yes; of course. But David did not; nor do I think he does now."

"This is very, very mysterious," said Davenport half aloud. "I can't make it out. How can she be heiress of Holford Hall?"

"Heiress of Holford! What! Maude—at least our Maude! What nonsense! Miss de Vere is heiress of that place; and all this land on either side of us, and for miles around is hers, or will be!"

Tom Hopton evidently knew no more, and his companion remained silently brooding on what seemed so singular—

even mysterious. He now began to incline that there might be some reason, at least some foundation, for what at first he considered Maude's insane delusion. While he was thus cogitating they came to a lane turning out from the high road.

"Here we are; sharp to the right; this will take us up to Black Ash Farm; and yonder, across the meadow, is the little river where your friends, or rather, as they would put it, your enemies the trout live. It's a private road this, and well kept too, like everything on this farm—just suit you, my boy."

They found the worthy farmer at home, and Tom at once plunged into his subject, and introduced his friend.

"This is the gentleman I spoke to you about—the fishing, you know."

After a little talk it was proposed that they should walk down to the stream in question. Davenport, with a fisherman's skilful glance, soon decided that there was good sport to be had, and at once proceeded to business.

"Well, now sir," he said, "I like the look of the place, and really want a month's quiet or so. If we can agree about terms, I'll take the fishing two months every year. What do you say to five-and-twenty pounds a month—or thirty?"

"Well, it's more than I was going to ask. The lowest sum you've mentioned, if it will suit you, will suit me, sir. Two months a year! That's fifty pounds; and fifty pounds I can tell you sir, comes handy to a farmer with an expensive family, and wheat at forty shillings a bushel. We have a little private sitting-room at the back, on the ground-floor, opening into the garden; that's at your

service; and as to a bed-room, there are plenty in this big, old house, so you can choose. There's a horse and dog-cart at your service too. I always ride myself, and keep the mare just for light work, or for a friend in such a case as this. You'll find her a stepper. She can do sixteen under the hour."

Business arrangements were soon made, and it was settled that Davenport should come in the following week.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## SYDNEY DAVENPORT ASKS A SERIOUS QUESTION.

BEFORE leaving Black-Ash Farm, Sidney Davenport was introduced to the daughters—two of whom were girls of fourteen or fifteen; the other, a fine, handsome girl, of seventeen or thereabouts. Then they started off; for Tom Hopton had got many patients to see, and that duty could not be neglected.

It was near nine o'clock when they got back to Cumberford. Hopton at once dived into the surgery to make up some medicine which must be despatched at once on a case of emergency; and Davenport, ascending to the smoking-room, there found David Luton.

"David, my boy," he said, slapping him on the back, "I am going to say something to you—to ask you some questions, in fact. Now, promise me that you won't be angry."

"I can safely promise you that my dear boy. I scarcely ever remember being angry—that is, really angry; and I am sure I never should be with you."

"But it's about family affairs, David—your own family affairs."

"Very well; I need have no secrets from you."

"Well, do you know, some words Maude let drop, and which were heard accidentally, set me thinking. Tom Hopton has been talking to me, too. You must excuse

my curiosity, but I really take a deep interest in Miss Luton."

"Don't apologise, but go on. I assure you I feel very glad to have somebody to talk to on serious matters. Hopton is a very good fellow, and I wouldn't part with him for the world; but he's such a jolly good-natured little fool, you can't talk to him seriously; at least I can't. Well, now, go on about Maude. Strange to say, I was that very moment thinking of her. She's come back with you, hasn't she?"

"Yes; we left her at the turnpike, and called for her coming back. I don't know what the old woman's been telling her. She remained silent, and I could tell that she had heard something which she, at least, thought of importance."

"She is a wonderful girl, and very beautiful, is Maude," said David dreamily; "but yet, somehow, I feel uneasy about her. Say what you have got to say, and then I will confide everything to you."

"Is there anything in the history of your cousin which can connect her in any way with Holford Hall and the property?"

"Not that I am aware of," was the straightforward reply.

"Any reason why she should suppose herself the heiress—the rightful heiress?"

"No."

"Now, about her father. If it will not pain you, tell me what you know about him?"

"It would not pain me; but unfortunately, I have little or nothing to tell."



"You did not know him?"

"I never saw him, nor even heard his name mentioned."

"What do you know about the marriage of Maude's mother—for of course she was married?"

"Undoubtedly. She eloped when I was a boy—a mere child. From what I have heard, I believe she met some one with whom she fell desperately in love; and who, having obtained a paramount influence over her mind, induced her to consent to a private marriage, and even compelled her to keep this marriage secret more than a year, when the poor girl—she was but a girl then—returned home with her baby, our Maude, only to die. I think he ill-used her, and then deserted her. Anyhow she died; and my uncle adopted Maude."

"Why did he call her by his own name—why not by her father's?"

"Ah, that I cannot answer. He had his reasons, doubtless. I am not even certain that he knew this man's name; or perhaps my aunt, his sister, confided it to him on her death-bed under promise of secrecy. But why such a thing should be I really can't conceive.

"Nor I," said Davenport; and then he was silent for about a minute. "You think your father knew more about it?"

"I think he must have done so. But you know he was always very reserved, and would be doubly so on such a subject as that."

"It appears to me that all you really know then is—that your aunt eloped and secretly married some person, who prevented her by his influence from letting her friends

know even his name ; that he was unkind to her, finally deserted her, and then she came home with her baby and died ?”

“ Yes ; that is about all.”

“ And about this vagabond husband of hers, Maude’s father ; does no one know anything of him, or of his fate ?”

“ Ah ? there now, I think my father knew something. I once understood from him, by a few words he let fall some two years ago, when speaking of Maude, that he knew who her father was. He spoke of him as a bad man, who had died a bad man’s death.”

“ Yes ; certainly that would imply that he knew the man and also that he was dead. Well now, David, one more question, and a most important one it is.—Are you quite certain that your aunt, Maude’s mother, was married—legally married to Maude’s father ?”

“ Quite certain !” was the prompt and decisive reply.

“ What reason have you to be so certain ?”

“ Because my father told me so and he was incapable of a lie.”

There was something in the simplicity of this answer which precluded further inquiry on Davenport’s part. He was buried in silent thought for some little time, but presently said wearily, like one who has pondered unsuccessfully over a problem.

“ Ah, well ; we won’t talk of it any more just at present. How about supper ?”

“ I hear the plates clattering now.”

They talked for a little while longer together, but the subject which was still uppermost in the mind of Sydney Davenport was mentioned no more that night.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## MOLLY RUMBLE'S REVELATION.

MAUDE, immediately on her return home, hurried to her room, and after taking off her bonnet and shawl, got out her desk, and commenced writing in a small, brass-bound book, with lock and key. She wrote slowly and with great care, pausing a considerable while between. The notes she was making related, as may be supposed, to what she had heard from the old woman at the turnpike.

Molly Rumble was fully seventy years of age, but one with a deal of life in her—ay, and talk and memory too. She was not a fat, soft old person—but a withered, dried, shrivelled-looking piece of humanity, troubled with rheumatism. But none the less likely to see her ninetieth birthday. Indeed, it is a strange fact, but none the less a fact, that old people when they are troubled with rheumatism, are proof against all other ills, and live on to a rare old age.

The old woman who kept the turnpike was bent and withered; her hands, too, she could scarcely use, while her arms looked like two withered branches. Nevertheless she was brisk and gossiping and would enjoy her cup of tea as well as any younger woman. Her eyesight could not have been greatly impaired either, for after a very brief examination of her visitor through her spectacles, she recognised her.

"You're Miss Maude," she said, "from the doctor's. Lord rest his soul for a good man!"

"How did you know me, Molly?" asked Maude.

"How did I know you? Did I not dandle you in my arms, when a baby, and bring you up till you could walk and talk? Ay, and didn't I hold your blessed mother in my arms when her poor wronged soul took flight to heaven? Ah, she was an angel, was your mother, miss! She had only been four year in the place, and every one loved her; and then there came that bad man—that wicked man God has punished before now—who stole her away from her home, married her in secret, then left her, and let her come home to die."

"It was about her I came to speak to you, Molly," Maude eagerly put in; "about her, and he too—my father. You know who he was?"

The old woman peered strangely at her visitor. "Ah, young lady, and do you really want to know?"

"Yes—oh, yes! You can't think how anxious I am to know everything."

"Well, well; if you must know you shall, though whether it will bring you good or evil, the Lord only knows. Your poor mother was half fearful when she let it slip from her. I think *he*—the man—her husband, I won't call him gentleman—made her swear some great oath. Any way, she was mortal terrified at the very name—the very thought of him."

"Now, nurse, do tell me all about it—there's a good old soul. Who was my father?"

"Rest easy a bit; let me have time to think of my story. And now, I mind me, it's the time I get my tea;

and you'll be not too proud to take a cup too, may be?"

Maude assented; and though she could with difficulty restrain her impatience, said nothing more, while the rustic girl the old woman had to help her, laid the tea-things on a small table. Then old Molly proceeded to make her darling beverage. At last this, to Maude, tedious operation of tea-drinking was got through with, and the old nurse was ready to commence her story. We will give the substance of it, briefly omitting much that was superfluous and due to Molly Rumble's formality, and also altering the language and spelling.

"It's about seventeen year ago last summer, as near as I can recollect, that the poor lady came back, bringing you with her, then a baby a month or two old. The doctor sent for me at once, for he saw she was ill; and I hadn't been in the house many hours before she was taken worse. At night there came a sort of delirium over her, and she talked wild, and said a lot I couldn't understand. But there was one name came often enough in her wanderings. I imagined that this was her husband."

"And what was the name?—tell me the name," Maude cried, in frantic eagerness; "but I know it. I can guess it—more than guess it, I feel sure. Nurse, dear nurse, do tell me the name."

Maude almost fainted for breath in her excitement; but the old woman did not allow herself to be discomposed.

"Don't get flurried, young miss. I don't like to see you like that. It bodes ill for what the news I give you will bring. Poor lady, she seemed to fear it would prove a curse to you."

"Do tell me, nurse, for Heaven's sake, the name—the name?"

"The name of this man was Stanton de Vere, who was once master of the hall, garden, and all the land about here."

"I knew it—I knew it," cried Maude, clasping her hands. "I was sure, quite sure it was so. Now, nurse, go on—I will not interrupt you any more."

After she had heard the name she grew suddenly quite calm, and listened quietly to the rest of Molly Rumble's narrative.

"Your poor mother grew slowly worse, and took it into her head to be brought to the window on a sofa, where she could just see Holford Hall. Then she took a fancy she wanted one of her boxes. I got it for her, and she began tearing up a lot of papers and letters, till there was quite a heap on the floor. Then she made me burn all the little bits. There was a small fire burning in the grate, just to heat up anything she might want in the way of gruel, or a warm drink; and I, not thinking much of it threw the whole heap in the grate. When the doctor came home next morning she was all but gone,—sinking fast,—and he told me she was dying. He was very vexed at my having burned all the papers; and he seemed to think that some certificate, or something of her marriage was among them. However, what was done could not be helped. All we could do was to ease the poor thing to her death. She kept talking feebly,—sometimes wandering, sometimes quite sensible—till she died."

"And her last words?"

"Her *last* words were about Holford Lees—and you,—her child; but she was wandering then, I don't think she knew the doctor or any body. But the last sensible words she said—I mean when she was quite reasonable and not a bit light-headed—were to me. Says she 'Molly, my good woman, I'm dying. I do not fear to die; God is merciful, and I hope for pardon and rest; but I am very, very unhappy about my child.' 'Oh, ma'am, I said, don't trouble; you may be sure she will be well taken care of.' 'Ah,' she said faintly, but still quite sensible, 'that may be; but her father!—no father!—no name! Oh, heavens! that she should live to be disowned—cast off—and no mother to watch over her and protect her.' Then she was quiet a little, and all at once broke out: 'Molly,' she said, 'I have something to tell you: I cannot die with it on my mind,—Heaven forgive me if I am wrong. *He* has not given me permission; and I said I would not without, but I must—I must. Let what I tell you now be a secret, and never divulge it to any one, except my child be in danger, and it will be for her happiness she should know it. God will guide you aright. If ever she should come to you and ask you, tell her.' And you see, young lady, you have come to ask me, and I'm telling you."

"And the secret?" said Maude quietly.

"You know it already. 'My child's father is Stanton de Vere,' she said, 'and my name also is De Vere; for he married me lawfully; and I am his wife, and my child is his. Ah! but he will relent and repent, and acknowledge her, and do justice to her and my memory. I know he will; and then if I am in heaven I will forgive him and

pray for him. Oh, but if he does not!—if not—I know—' and here the poor lady raised herself partly on the sofa and pointed up,—‘then God will see justice done to my child.’ Then she soon got delirious again, and then death came and put an end to her sufferings, and the Lord took her to Himself.”

“And is this all you have to tell me?” Maude asked.  
“Did my poor mother leave no papers?”

“Nothing at all: nothing in the way of papers but a few in an old workbox. When I found the doctor set most store by what I’d burnt, I gathered up what were not destroyed by the fire and put all together in the little workbox.”

“And what became of that workbox?” Maude asked.

“I gave it to Dr. Luton, and he put it in an iron safe he had and locked it up. I have never seen it since.”

“So I am indeed the daughter of Stanton de Vere!” she said musingly. “Was he a very bad man?”

“He was a violent self-willed man, and died the death of a violent man. You know, miss, he was found dead. Some said his gun went off by accident; but others would have it that he killed himself, and others said—ay, and a great many too—that he was *mad*,—had been mad all his life; indeed I’ve heard some go so far as to say it was in the family, and that his father before him was just the least bit touched. But I beg pardon; I forgot it was your father I was speaking of, miss.”

Maude made no immediate reply, but presently asked,  
“And my poor uncle—did he know anything of this,



that my mother had eloped with, and been married to, Mr. de Vere?"

"I don't think he knew for certain; but I'm almost sure he had a sort of suspicion. Many and many a time, when I've been nursing you, and he's been admiring your pretty face and your beautiful eyes,—ah,—your eyes,—that reminds me—oh, but they are like his—the very image."—

"Like whose?"

"Like Mr. De Vere's—your father. I've seen him often. I've been times and times at the great hall, before and since."

Maude drew back, and a little shudder shot across her frame—very slight—not enough to indicate that she did not like to be likened to her father.

"Never mind about that, nurse, but go on with what you were saying about my uncle."

"I will, miss. I can't call to mind his exact words; but I'd said something about you—about the poor child having no father—at least not knowing who was her father when she grew up. Then the doctor says, quite sharp, 'Nurse, it's best as it is; the child will never want—I will be a father to her.' Her mother has left a little fortune, which is in my hands, and she shall have it, and as much more as I can save by the aid of my wife. Yes, it's better as it is; I will be better to her than ever a bad father would have been. So you see Miss Maude, that led me to think he knew, or at least suspected how things were."

"Is it not a wonder then he never made any inquiries—never ascertained for certain about my mother's name and marriage?"

"Ah, Miss, you see Dr. Luton, was a kind-hearted, easy man, and he had had hard work for many years at his practice before he kept an assistant. Then, you see, he saw you growing-up at his knee, a beautiful child, and so happy and innocent, that I daresay he said 'I will never vex her—never let her know, if I can help it, the sad history of her mother; it will only make her unhappy. Let her grow up in ignorance of her parentage, and bear our name. There are only David and I of the family now; people will think she is the daughter of my brother, though I never had one.' That's the way I account for it miss."

On consideration, Maude thought that this suggestion of the old woman's was a shrewd one; and likely to prove correct.

Very shortly after this the brougham called for her, and she bade the old woman farewell, promising to come again; and resolved in her own mind not to be empty-handed another time. She did not like to offer the old woman money, and often reproached herself with her selfishness in not having thought of bringing some little comforts or luxuries.

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## CHAPTER XV.

## MAUDE MAKES HER PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

AFTER her interview with Molly Rumble, Maude Luton grew very quiet, thoughtful, and reserved. She spent much of her time in her own room, and wrote often in her little book. Though she knew nothing of logical sequence, and the necessity of having well-defined premises on which to reason—like a foundation to a house—she yet had plain common-sense to draw up a brief statement of all she knew, and appended marginal notes thereto. This is what she finally copied out on a clean page of her book, after many corrections and alterations :

“My unhappy mother, Miss Maude Luton, about the year 18—, that is to say, about seventeen years ago, made the acquaintance of a gentleman in the neighbourhood of this place—Cumberford. She grew deeply attached to him; and he, having acquired a complete influence over her, persuaded her to leave her home and marry him privately. They were married—but where, at present I cannot say. He was a man of violent temper and domineering will, and absolutely forbade her to reveal to whom she was married—even to her own brother. This man got tired of her—was unkind to her—perhaps ill-used her—and finally deserted her. Then she came home with her infant, and shortly after died. But she did not die without leaving

some trace of the identity of her recreant husband. She frequently mentioned his name, and confided it, in evident terror and misgiving as to whether she was doing right, to Molly Rumble, who was attending her as nurse. From this I gather that the husband had extorted from her some terrible oath, by which she felt bound ; and between this and her dread of dying and leaving her child nameless—with no means of ever proving her legitimacy or her father's name—she was terribly agitated and torn by doubt. Finally—under promise of secrecy that what she said was not to be revealed unless for the obvious good of her child, or unless that child should herself demand to know her parentage—she told this nurse, Molly Rumble, that her husband was Stanton de Vere, of Holford Hall. Shortly she became delirious ; and after raving for a while about her child being the heiress of Holford Hall, she died. Mr. Stanton de Vere shortly after married another lady—an opera singer, or something of that sort. She too died, leaving a daughter, who in cruel mockery, this madman—this violent self-willed wicked man—named Maude, after his first wife, whom by his cruelty and neglect he drove to her grave.

“ Shortly after the death of his second wife, Stanton de Vere came home to his estate, and one day was found dead in the preserves with his discharged gun lying beside him. Some said it was accident ; but others—probably the majority—strove to revive the reports about his insanity, and held that he had shot himself purposely. Here with his death, ends all record at present.

“ His daughter Maude de Vere, is alive, and his other daughter, known as Maude Luton, but also named De Vere

by right, is alive. It shall be her task to assert her right to the name, and vindicate her mother's memory."

This was one of the memoranda, or rather statements, which Maude had written in her book ; and this she distinguished as No. 1. No. 2. was very brief.

"It shall be my object first to prove my mother's marriage to Mr. Stanton de Vere, and my legitimacy and right to the name ; secondly, to assert and claim any rights which priority of birth may give me over the other Maude, the daughter of that hateful woman for whom he probably deserted my mother."

Next came No. 3. This was in the nature of a scheme or plan of action :

"First I must trace out and prove the fact of the marriage, and discover where it took place and all particulars. This may be an object of difficulty, but it must and shall be done. To do this and to prove my birth, I must, I imagine, trace them out from the day she fled from her mother's home with this cruel man.

"A few words will express the task I have before me. I have to discover and prove the marriage of Stanton de Vere with Maude Luton in the year 18—. How is this to be done? It is no easy task. I have reason to believe, however, that the marriage took place in the north of England or Scotland. Probably then Mr. Stanton de Vere, who was a restless, wandering man, always moving about, took her to some place he had visited before. If I can discover any of his haunts or favourite resorts for sporting or other purposes in the North (he was, I believe, a keen sportsman), I may very probably succeed. This is one means by which I may obtain the knowledge I seek.

Another chance lies in the torn fragments of letters which Molly Rumble put by in the little workbox : a third in what I may discover through the present De Vere family. Though my mother has left little record, it is probable my father has left important documents ; and could I have access to his desks and papers, I could, I fancy, discover what I wanted. Now with regard to the first plan, to ascertain whether Mr. De Vere was in the habit of going to the north of England and Scotland, that is sufficiently difficult, as he has been dead for sixteen years. As to the third plan, that also is difficult ; it would involve getting an introduction to, and on familiar terms with, the present De Vere family. The second mode seems at once the readiest and most easy. It will be strange indeed if I can get no clue, however slight, from the fragments of papers my mother left."

Maude Luton by no means came to these conclusions at once or without deep thought ; for several days she turned the matter over in her mind, and grasped each heading, so to say, separately and arranged them afterwards. It was nearly a week after her interview with the old nurse that she one evening sought out her cousin.

"David," she said, "I want you to do something for me."

"I am at your service, Maude,"

"You are aware my poor uncle had an iron safe?"

"Yes ; he kept there papers and money, when there was any considerable quantity in the house."

"But besides papers there is in that safe an old work-box belonging to my mother. Molly Rumble told me of this."

"I think I have seen a small box on the top shelf ; but

as it was old, and seemed to be only filled with torn bits of paper and that sort of thing, I never paid any attention to it."

"I want you to let me have it, please."

"Certainly, Maude, I will go and get it at once."

In a minute or two he returned with it in his hand ; and Maude having obtained the treasure, ran away with it to her own room.

Then she commenced a close and careful examination, beginning with those papers which were not torn. These, however, were mostly of no value to her ; they consisted principally of letters written to her mother years before her unhappy marriage. There were also some tradesmen's bills and receipts, dated most of them more than twenty years back. These of course referred to the time when she kept house for her brother ; there was one letter, however, which Maude put aside. It was dated before her mother left home ; there was no signature except the initials S. V. Maude at once concluded that these stood for Stanton de Vere. A great part of the letter was of no importance whatever ; it was written from London, evidently from expressions used in it, and was in answer to one from her. This, then, Maude thought, was when he had shortly made her acquaintance, and was urging his suit ; the one thing she looked upon as of value, among all the rubbish the letter contained was a single sentence, in which marriage was spoken of :

"My dearest girl, I can't marry you publicly : it is at present impossible. I explained that to you, I thought, fully when I saw you ; nor can I see the objections you do to a private wedding—which would have to be kept secret, however, for some little time at least."

This letter she read and re-read, and then carefully placed it on one side ; then she turned her attention to the fragments. It was weary work this trying to piece little bits together, and make out half a sentence—here only a word or two. But her patience was rewarded ; for she presently found several pieces which when joined together, formed the top part of a letter. She made out the date, October 6th, 18—. This would be about two months and a half or three months after her mother's leaving home ; then, beneath the date, she read in distinct characters the word "KILMARNOCK." That was a town in Scotland, she felt sure ; and when decided on that, she went on with beating heart to decipher the little bits she had put together.

"My dearest husband," she read, "do, pray, when you have transacted your business, come to me at once. I feel so dull and lonely. If I might only write and tell my brother all, I should—"

Here the fragments ended ; nor could she by the most diligent search, find any other pieces to fit in ; however, the one word *Kilmarnock*, was a great result. They had been at this place between two and three months after their marriage. Possibly they were married there ; at any rate there was a hope—a good chance she thought—of tracing them backward to the place from whence they came, and so on to where they were married.

Be it remembered here that she never for a moment allowed herself to question the fact that they were really and legitimately married. She assumed that, with scarcely sufficient warrant—forgetting that the only evidence she



had of the fact was her mother's own belief in it. She did not think, enthusiastic as she was in the cause, that her mother might have been deluded by a false marriage.

No ; she was married—and to Stanton de Vere. Of that she was certain, and on that she based every thing. There were many other fragments ; but she could not then succeed in piecing any together ; so she gummed the portion of the letter she had succeeded in joining on a clean sheet of paper, and put the rest carefully away.

The next morning after breakfast, she enlisted Sydney Davenport to assist her. She was now on excellent terms with him.

“Mr. Davenport, where is Kilmarnock ?”

“Somewhere in Scotland ; but really at this moment I can't tell you exactly where. Why do you ask ?—any particular reason ?”

“Yes ; a very, very particular reason. I wish you would find out for me all about the place,—where it is, what sort of a place it is, whether large or small, how you get there, and how people did twenty years ago. Also all about the surrounding country, and anything else you can learn.”

“Really it is quite a nice little task you have set me,” he said good-naturedly ; “however, I'll do my best. I'll go over to Oxford, I think, this afternoon, and return to-morrow ; there I'll get a Bradshaw and a guide-book for Scotland. Between the two we shall find out something about this Kilmarnock, I have no doubt. I will make a note of it.”

"I thank you. I shall be so very, very much obliged to you."

Thus Maude slowly and persistently strove on at her purpose. Several times she thought of taking Sydney Davenport into her confidence, telling him all her aims and hopes, and asking his assistance. However, she felt diffident and shy, and could not quite decide to do so just at present. She was aware that this gentleman took a deep interest in her. She knew that he watched with curiosity and took notice of every expression in her face, every word she let fall—not rudely, or in the least offensively, but in a manner which was rather flattering than otherwise. Perhaps it was this which made her shy and disinclined to tell him, and ask for aid. She remembered—not bitterly or angrily now—his before-expressed opinion on some subjects with which women should not interfere. He might, she thought, fancy that this purpose on which she was so earnestly bent was not a proper one for her,—that it was unmaidenly on her part. Anyhow, she resolved not to speak to him on the subject just at present. Day-by-day, however, her confidence in him increased, and the knowledge of the magnitude and difficulty of her self-imposed task grew upon her. She had unconsciously acquired a habit of asking his opinion when she wanted to be enlightened on any subject. He returned from Oxford, according to promise, bringing with him not one, but several guide-books and works on Scotland. In these she could learn all she wanted to know about Kilmarnock, he said; and forthwith she set herself to the task. The next day she again came to him, or at least, while walking with him in the

evening, she all at once made up her mind to ask his advice on another point.

"Mr. Davenport, I am going to bother you again," she said, blushing a little, and glancing timidly at his face.

"My dear young lady, I am at your service. I have nothing better to do; and, let me add, I cannot be more pleasantly employed than in doing your bidding."

"It is something strange to hear a flattering speech from you, Mr. Davenport," she said, smiling.

"It is no flattery, I assure you," he replied frankly. "I never flatter, but always mean what I say."

"Well, now, I want you to recommend me to a respectable solicitor,—what they call a 'sharp' one, I mean; one who, if he is paid, will make all necessary inquiries, and get any information his employer wants; some one who will spare neither time nor pains in following a rather difficult clue."

"I think I can recommend you to such a man—or rather men, for it is a firm. They are Jews,—Messrs. Jacobs and Levy; not pleasant people by any means, but very clever and, as you say, sharp. They have successfully carried through some very difficult cases, and have a great reputation for skill in tracing out evidence of events which have happened long ago."

"The very thing I want, Mr. Davenport; the very thing. Please give me their address."

Sydney Davenport did so, and began speculating when he was alone on what she could want of Messrs. Jacobs and Levy. He formed a very shrewd guess, but resolved to say nothing,—to wait and watch events. He had been

aware for some time that the girl was persistently working out some scheme or other. Her manner convinced him of that.

Maude Luton went to her cousin. "David," she said, "I am come to ask you for something."

"What is it, Maude?"

"Money, David. Don't be frightened,—I assure you it is for a good purpose."

"Of course it is, if you require it, Maude," he said heartily. "How much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds."

"I have not so much in the house ; but I will get it for you to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Certainly. You are not angry with me, David?"

"Angry with you Maude ! Whatever should put such an idea into your silly head ? Of course not." The next day, David Luton placed in her hand, not fifty, but a hundred pounds,—all in five pound notes. "I thought it better to let you have a hundred, Maude. It is right you should always have money. Don't be afraid of asking me whenever you require any."

"Thank you, thank you, dear cousin ; you are indeed kind. I am so much obliged to you." Then Maude hurried to her room, and commenced writing to Messrs. Jacobs and Levy. It was a long time before she could indite a letter to please herself

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## CHAPTER XVI.

## "NOBODY'S DAUGHTER!"

MAUDE LUTON took extreme care in writing the letter to the lawyers, Messrs. Jacobs and Levy. She felt not unnaturally, shy and timid, and shrank from at once plunging into the stormy waters of active business with business men. Not liking the idea of opening the correspondence in her own name, she cast about for a long time vainly, as to how to manage it. At first she thought of confiding in her cousin David; but a little consideration told her that this course was not advisable. She knew intuitively that it would be impossible to find one less suited than David Luton to undertake or assist in such a complicated business. For a moment her thoughts rested on Tom Hopton; but him she dismissed at once from her mind. Then, by a process of exhaustion, Sydney Davenport presented himself to her thoughts. She shrank from the idea at first, but gradually accustomed herself thereto, and finally resolved to ask his advice and aid.

"Mr. Davenport," she said frankly, "I have a favour to ask you."

"It is granted," he replied.

"Do not say that; do not talk in that manner—in that ridiculous manner. It annoys me very much," she cried. "I wish you would not treat me with such contempt—

like a child, in fact. How can you reasonably promise to grant a request before you know its nature?"

Mr. Davenport was in this instance fairly at a loss, and had to own his fault. "I mean to say," he explained, "that I will do everything in my power."

"Ah, that is more sensible now. I will now tell you what I want done. I am going to write to these lawyers to whom you introduced me; I don't like doing so in my own name. Will you let them address to my initials, or any initials, under cover to you."

"Willingly. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

For a moment or two she hesitated, feeling half inclined to confide in him completely, and take the benefit of his knowledge of the world and experience. But this same timidity and shyness prevented her, and she said nothing on the subject, though he could not have failed to notice her hesitation, and judge accordingly that she wished to say something, but scarcely knew how to do so.

The letter was dispatched, and in due course brought a cautiously-worded reply. Messrs. Jacobs and Levy expressed their willingness to do their utmost in the matter mentioned by their correspondent, provided they were furnished with full particulars. Probably a journey to Scotland by an agent would be necessary, who would be put to some considerable expense for travelling, lodging, and making inquiries. Probably the journey would cost thirty or forty pounds.

Hereupon, Maude Luton wrote to them giving full particulars, and enclosing forty pounds in notes. A re-

ply was received by return of post acknowledging the receipt of her letter with money, and informing her that a special messenger, an agent of Messrs. Jacobs and Levy, had been sent to Kilmarnock; and it might be confidently expected that in the course of a week or fortnight he would have ferreted out all she required, provided the information they had was quite correct.

Maude Luton had now to wait inactive a week at the least. The time, however, did not pass heavily. She and Sydney Davenport became great friends, and no one day passed without their riding or walking together. Her cousin had provided her with a horse; and as she was fond of riding, she did not fail to avail herself thereof.

The day came for Davenport to take his departure from Cumberford; but as he was only going so far as Black-Ash-Farm, it was not looked upon in the light of a separation. Tom Hopton was to drive Maude over on the succeeding day, when Sydney would show her over his new domain, and report to the assistant his fortune at the piscatorial art.

True to their time, our heroine and Mr. Hopton drove up to the garden-gate of Black-Ash Farm, and were met there by Davenport.

"All the family are out, Miss Luton," he said, so I cannot introduce you. Tom has, I know, a round of some miles to do. I propose we take a stroll down by the river; it is really delightful."

No objection being made to this, Mr. Hopton drove away, promising to return in a couple of hours; and the two strolled together across stiles and pleasant meadows,

by the side of fields of waving corn, down to the clear little trout-stream. Sydney pointed out to his companion the most picturesque spots, and also such as he thought the favourite haunts of the fish. After an hour or so they walked back to the house.

"Ah, the young ladies have returned," he said, "I see the fluttering of a muslin-dress in the garden."

"How many daughters has your worthy host?" Maude asked carelessly.

"Five. One about your age; the others quite girls."

"Are they pretty?"

"Well, yes. The eldest is what one would call a 'fine girl.' She is not of that order of beauty, however, which would captivate me. I can't say I like fair auburn-haired girls."

"Ah, you say that because I am dark," Maude replied.

"Well, to own the truth—though I was not at the moment thinking of you—I think it is quite likely you influenced my opinion. Who could admire a pink-and-white, fair-haired doll, after contemplating——"

Mr. Davenport stopped himself somewhat abruptly. He was about to say something very flattering, and yet was unconscious of the wish to flatter. On his part it was quite involuntary; Maude, on hers, felt a little pleased, just an inner tremor of satisfaction thrilled through her, for which she did not attempt to account.

The farm-house was nearly surrounded by lawn and garden, so that coming from their walk by the river. Sydney and Maude arrived in front of the house, where the parlour-windows opened on the smooth grass. One of the young ladies whose muslin, Davenport had



caught a glimpse of, had just gone in. The other was nipping dead twigs from a rose-tree, and it was to this one they advanced.

"Miss Rose Clarke, allow me to introduce you to a young lady a great friend of mine—Miss Luton."

Miss Clarke, a good looking great girl, blushed and tittered, as country-bred girls will ; and then, at his proposal, they went into the parlour, where was another young lady a year older. Again the form was gone through, neither paying much attention to a casual introduction ; indeed probably none of the three caught the names correctly. Certainly Maude did not, or her attention would have been at least attracted, if only for a moment.

Our heroine seated herself by the table, and carelessly looked at a few ornamental books there scattered about. She was perfectly at her ease, nor had the slightest suspicion that there would be any unpleasantness. One of the two girls presently went into the garden, and called out after a moment—

"Oh, Mr. Davenport—oh, Rose—do come here ; there is such a beautiful large butterfly on this rose-tree ! I should so like to know the name of it. Come quick, or it will be gone."

Miss Rose and Davenport went out through the window, leaving Maude sitting at the table, still looking at the books. But scarcely had they left her a moment, than the door opened, and another person entered the room. Maude rose, as in politeness bound, and at first observed only that it was a young lady, also dressed in muslin—probably the eldest sister.

The light was shining full on Miss Luton's face while

the new arrival stood comparatively in shadow. The latter remained standing for a moment staring hard at our heroine, who merely bowed, wondering rather why she did not speak. When she did, her voice had a marvellous effect. Maud started and coloured violently; then turned pale stood for a moment irresolute.

"So Miss Luton, we meet again, do we? To what do I owe this intrusion? How dare you come here?"—her voice rose in pitch with each word—"how dare you, you minx, you hussey, you wretch? This is my father's house; we are his children and bear his name. We are not like you—a nameless thing—nobody's daughter! yes, nobody's daughter!" And with this last word, she almost screamed, and absolutely stamped her foot with passion.

Maude, though this scene came upon her by surprise, did not lose her presence of mind; at least, if she were a little bit taken aback at first, she instantly recovered.

"Miss Clarke," she said—"Miss Dolly Clarke, I was not aware this was your father's house, or I certainly should not have entered it. Be good enough to stand on one side."

Dolly Clarke was close to the open window, which her dress partly covered. Somehow, in spite of her bold words, she felt awed by her enemy's steady look and fearless face, and involuntarily drew a little back.

Maude immediately swept by her, and as she passed drew her dress around her with an angry contemptuous hitch, as though she wished to avoid being contaminated. She walked straight to the gate; but she heard behind her still the hateful words in the hateful voice of Dolly Clarke:

"NOBODY'S DAUGHTER!—NOBODY'S DAUGHTER!"

When she was outside the gate she stopped, and turning, called to Sydney: "Mr. Davenport, will you come here please?"

Her voice was not half so loud as the angry screech of Miss Dolly; but nevertheless our friend heard it, though he had failed to do so in the other case. Instantly ceasing from his pursuit of the butterfly, in which he had joined the two girls, he at once came up to her. Long before he reached her he noticed that she was very pale—next that she was trembling.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked breathlessly. "Are you ill?"

"Yes—that is to say, I am not ill; but there is much the matter. Why did you bring me here to this place, to be outraged in this manner? Nobody's daughter!—oh!"

She drew a gasping breath, and her small hands were so tightly clasped that instantly the fastenings flew off each glove. Her eyes gleamed so brightly, and there was such a wild look in them, that again for a moment there shot over his mind a thought that she must be mad.

"Miss Luton calm yourself, I beg of you. I do not understand you. Why this excitement? Will you explain?"

"Not now, not now. Come away quickly—at once—this very instant—come."

"But I must go back and say good-bye to the young ladies."

"No no; come with me. Leave this place, I say—I insist upon it."

And now Maude forgetting in her just passion that though she took a great interest in Mr. Davenport, she had no right whatever to dictate to him,—to order him; in fact, to insist.

"Really, Miss Luton," he said, hesitating, "I think you are unreasonable. I really must—"

"Oh, if you choose to stay, do so by all means," she cried angrily, forgetting that he knew nothing of the cause of quarrel, and that her conduct to him must appear utterly incomprehensible.

A minute or so before, he had left her sitting contentedly enough in the little parlour; and now she rushed out, called to him across the lawn, and ordered him to accompany her. A brief gleam of light shot across his mind.

"Ah," he thought, wrongly enough, "she is annoyed—absurdly jealous because I left her alone for a moment. And yet that she should fly into such a violent passion is most strange and unlike her."

While he thus hesitated, she decided the matter.

"Ah," she cried, "here comes Mr. Hopton. Since you choose to remain, you can do so. I can dispense with your escort and your company." And with these words she walked quickly away.

"Mr. Hopton," she said, "I have just left Mr. Davenport. Please drive me home at once."

"Are you ill?" asked the good-natured assistant, noticing the pallor, the livid hue which pervaded her face. What is the matter?—you look quite faint."

"Yes, I think I am a little, please drive me home at once."

He assisted her into the low chaise in which they had

driven over, turned the horse's head the other way, and then before starting, looked back wistfully. "I should just like to speak one word to Sydney, to—"

"Not now, Mr. Hopton, not now," she interrupted. "Please drive me home."

Her 'please' had too much decision and command in it for Tom Hopton to resist ; so he at once started off, wondering not a little what on earth could be the matter with Miss Luton. "Hysterical, I fancy ; thought she was liable to that sort of thing first time I saw her. Ah, she's getting better I notice — the breeze is doing her good."

Now the first part of this unspoken sentence was quite without foundation. Mr. Hopton had never thought her hysterical—such an idea had never entered his head ; but he had a habit, after any event occurred, of persuading himself "he always thought so." As to the second portion, that was true enough ; for she rapidly regained her composure, and was able to think quietly on what had occurred.

Again and again the memory of those words, "nobody's daughter !" came back ; her hands would clench involuntarily, and her cheek pale. To this anger at the insult put upon her there came another feeling—pique and annoyance at Davenport. She did not remember at the moment how sharply and imperiously she had spoken, nor how strange the whole affair—this sudden outburst of passion—must have seemed to him ; nor did she think how little he was mentally constituted to submit to such unqualified and unexplained demands. She thought that when next they met she would be a little cool to him, and then perhaps he would ask an explanation. What—what that

horrid girl should first tell her tale, and prejudice him against her?

Her pride suggested, "Well, if he choose to believe such wicked scandal, let him do so ; I care not for the friendship of such a man."

Now this was what happened between Mr. Sydney Davenport and Dolly Clarke. He watched at the gate ; saw her stop Tom Hopton as he drove up ; watched her enter the chaise. and stood there till it was fairly out of sight.

"She is either mad," he said,—*"downright mad, or she must have taken umbrage at being left alone. It's not reasonable to suppose that I should be ordered about in that imperious manner. Even if the girl had a claim upon me I would not submit to it. Thus thinking, he walked slowly across the lawn, and was met by the eldest Miss Clarke. She still bore traces on her features of the passion she had just indulged in ; and this Davenport at once saw. Her face was flushed ; her eyes preternaturally bright, and even a little bloodshot.*

"Mr. Davenport, do you know that young person who has just gone ?"

"Do I know her ? —that young person ! I certainly do know that young lady, or I should not have brought her here in company with Mr. Hopton, and introduced her to your sisters. She is Miss Luton, and is the niece of an old friend of mine,—the late Dr. Luton, of Cumberford."

"Ah, indeed ! I don't envy you your acquaintance." And so saying, Miss Clarke turned her head and tried to look contemptuous.

"Miss Clarke, I must really beg of you not to make such

a remark about any young lady or friend of mine. I know her, and know her uncle and cousin, and have for years!"

"You know her? Ah, indeed! And you know her uncle and her cousin?" Here this amiable young lady's eyes gleamed with spiteful triumph. "Do you know her father? Does anybody know her father?"

"I cannot say that I do," he replied with a little embarrassment, for he was aware that there was some sort of disagreeableness in connection with this topic.

"Do you even know her father's name?"

"I cannot say that I do."

"No, nor no one else. Nobody knows. She's nobody's daughter,—that's what she is!"

"Really, Miss Clarke, I do not understand your words, or the angry feeling with which you speak."

"Oh, I will soon explain. People say about here that her mother ran away with some one who never married her, but sent her back with her baby (Miss Maude Luton, as she calls herself now) when he was tired of her,—that's all. And as to why I speak and dared to tell her she was not wanted here, I can soon tell you all about that. I was at the same school with her, and she chose to try on her stock of airs with me. I soon gave her a bit of my mind; told her, as I did just now, that she was nobody's daughter. She didn't like that, you may be sure, but they all took her part; and though she had to leave on account of it, so had I. As to why I spoke to her just now, I did it because of her former insolence to me—as if she were better than any one else. Besides such a creature is not fit company for us; and I am sure that our pa' would not encour-

age any nameless thing like her. So now you know all about it."

Mr. Sydney Davenport listened to this violent angry speech in silence; nor did he reply when the young lady had concluded. He felt shocked and grieved that Maude should have been subjected to such insult, and disgusted with this vixen school-girl, who could thus behave. As he said nothing, she asked him presently,—

"Well, Mr. Davenport, don't you think that I was right? I see you didn't know anything about this."

"I don't think you were right, and beg to decline further conversation on the matter, Miss Clarke. Here comes your father. Excuse me. I want to talk to him." He bowed coldly to Miss Dolly, who though she coloured with vexation, could not possibly pursue the subject; and so had to go off and fume and fret alone.

"Ah, the wretch!" she said; "I annoyed her then; and I believe I've put a spoke in her wheel with this gentleman who I expect she's trying to get hold of, the artful thing—for they say he's rich. I'll have my revenge on her,—see if I don't,—for getting me turned out from Miss Martin's."

Strange to say, at that very moment, Maude Luton was thinking of Miss Dolly Clarke. These words were ringing in her ears, "nobody's daughter." "Ah," she said to herself,—and instinctively her small hands were clenched, the well-cut lips pressed together,—“if ever I have an opportunity I will be revenged on that girl for the bitter insult she has put upon me. ‘Nobody's daughter!’ She shall yet rue those words.”

And Sydney Davenport,—he too could not get rid of the



memory of them, as they were spoken by the voice, hardened by passion, of Miss Dorothy Clarke.

“Poor Maude,” he thought; “it is very hard she should be thus insulted. ‘Nobody’s daughter!’ What an unpleasant sound the words have! To think of her, so handsome and gifted, being thus taunted with not knowing her own father! It is very dreadful—very disagreeable. It is not her fault, poor girl; but what a terrible stigma—‘Nobody’s daughter!’”

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## CHAPTER XVII.

## A CALAMITY AT HOLFORD HALL.

MR. DAVENPORT passed the next few days at Black Ash Farm, going out early in the morning, taking his lunch with him, and not returning till late in the evening. He tried to behave exactly as usual to the girls whenever he met them, but could not avoid feeling a great repugnance to the eldest, which all his efforts could not disguise. She noticed it, and hated Maude the more, well knowing that it was caused by her behaviour on that day. She carefully avoided the subject, and tried on every occasion to show her amiability, informing him that she was hasty-tempered, but very forgiving, and so on.

Before the day on which her temper overpowered her, she had taken a fancy to their fisherman-visitor, and flattered herself that he was inclined to reciprocate it. Sydney was handsome and rich ; and every way a desirable acquisition.

But after that unfortunate affair, she felt her chance was driven down to zero. However there was one good point, —and from it she strove to auger well,—he did not go over to Cumberford to see her hated rival. On that point she made enquiries, thoroughly satisfied herself, and laid this soothing unction to her soul, that though he was displeased with her for her violent language and display of bad tem-

per, her words had yet had their effect, and he had decided to discontinue his acquaintance with Miss Maude.

But in this conjecture she was quite wrong. He kept away because he wanted time to think, and also from an undefined feeling that he would not appear too humble after her very abrupt manner and words on their parting. But he had not the slightest intention of declining her further acquaintance ; on the contrary, he deeply felt for her, and knowing almost to a certainty, as he did, that she was extremely anxious to prove the fact of her mother's marriage, he resolved to assist her all in his power. Let it not be supposed, however, that Miss Clarke's amiable words had produced absolutely no effect. He, in common with most people of decent position, had a feeling approaching to horror, of illegitimacy,, and its consequent stigma.

Were he quite sure that she was not born in wedlock, it is probable he would not have attempted to disguise from himself the fact that he could not quite think of her as an equal. But he persuaded himself that she was maligned, and that the strange mystery about her father was a pure misfortune, and no stigma whatever should by rights rest on her. Certainly it was unfortunate his name could not be positively ascertained ; but that, time might perhaps put right. At all events, he resolved to assist and befriend the girl in every way in his power.

"As to her imperious manner, though," he said to himself, "I must really let her understand, in a quiet kind of way, that she must not exhibit it on me. I have a dread of a tyrannically-minded woman ; and if I even cared for a girl (which I don't for Maude Luton), I would not allow her to assert a right to implicit unquestioning obedience."

Three days after the affair between Maude and Dolly Clarke, an important event happened at Holford Hall.

Old Mrs. De Vere, the grandmother of the young heiress was overturned in her carriage by a drunken coachman. David Luton and Tom Hopton happened to be in the immediate neighbourhood at the time, and their services were immediately called into requisition. The young lady too Miss Maude de Vere, who, for a wonder, on this occasion was in the carriage with her grandmother, was injured, but not severely.

Sydney Davenport heard the news very shortly after the accident, for Holford Park was close to Black Ash Farm ; indeed, a part of the grounds of the Hall were only divided from the meadows of Mr. Clarke by the little stream.

Tom Hopton called on Sydney a couple of hours after the accident, leaving David Luton in attendance. He reported that Mrs. de Vere was badly injured, and could not live : but that the girl had received no serious hurt—merely a few bruises and a sprained shoulder. The intelligence had no particular interest for Sydney ; but to the Clarkes it was of great moment, as the farm was a part of the Holford estates, and the death of the old lady might affect the tenure. The other guardian of Miss de Vere would then have complete control over all the property, and he might see fit to raise the rent, or even give notice to quit.

As Hopton had predicted, the old lady died that same night. The girl Miss de Vere, was in considerable pain, and wished David Luton, who had first attended her, to do so still. Accordingly, during the next few days, the young surgeon made frequent visits to the Hall, and grew a favour-

ite with the young lady, who in a perfectly childish and innocent way, told him so to his face. Indeed, she was but a child—not so much in body as in mind. Her intellect was singularly uncultivated. She was certainly the reverse of precocious. In disposition she was affectionate, easily pleased at times, but subject to fits of melancholy at others. She was wayward, weak, and yielding, and altogether a sort of girl to be petted and caressed like a delicate fawn—not to be looked upon at all as a young woman. This was David Luton's account of her; and when questioned as to her personal appearance, he said that he thought she was good-looking.

“Yes, now he remembered he was sure she was.”

“What style of beauty was hers?” Sydney asked amused at David's replies.

“I don't know much about styles of beauty. I never was a judge. She's slender and not short, and dark too, with beautiful eyes; in fact, not unlike our Maude.”

This set our friend thinking; and it flashed across his mind, that, if Maude was right in her conjecture (for he was quite sure what was her opinion on the point), they were half-sisters—both daughters of the same father.

“David,” he said presently, “there's a beautiful bit of fishing just beyond the last of Clarke's meadows; but it is only to be got at from the other side, which is part of the Holford grounds. Now I've got a small punt, do you think this wealthy young heiress would grant me permission to cross over and fish from her ground?”

“I'll be bound she will,” was the prompt answer. “Anyhow, I'll ask her to-morrow.”

And on the morrow afternoon, David proudly produced

a little pink envelope with letter enclosed, to this effect ; Miss de Vere's compliments to Mr. Davenport and he, or any friend of Mr. Luton was quite welcome to the use of the grounds and park for any purpose.

"Really," said Sydney, "this is generous and vague in the extreme. 'For any purpose whatever.' I suppose then, I may if I so choose, shoot the deer or cut down the timber."

At this there was a laugh, and David added, with innocent pride, that Miss de Vere had kindly given him permission to see over the Hall and picture-gallery ; and had also asked him to bring his cousin, her namesake, whenever he pleased, and to tell her that if she were fond of painting and statuary, or sketching, she should have the run of the place. "In fact, she behaved like a princess," David wound up by saying.

"A regular brick—no mistake," put in Tom Hopton.

With this the subject dropped ; and that evening Sydney Davenport returned with them to Cumberford, proposing to remain there till the following afternoon.

His meeting with our heroine, Maude, was a little constrained, certainly. He felt embarrassed, remembering the untoward manner in which they parted. At first there was a slight coldness, but this he soon dispelled.

"I am sorry there should have been any unpleasantness over at Black Ash between you and that vulgar Miss Clarke,"—(this alone nearly made his peace)—"I had no idea she had ever known you, and certainly would never have thought any decently brought up girl would attempt to revenge a school-quarrel by an insult."

The memory of the nature of this insult caused him to

add (with express but kindly intention to mislead), "I don't know what passed between you, but I suppose some sharp words or other; for you both looked dreadfully angry. I can assure you I told her plainly what I thought of her conduct. I have not been on particularly good terms with her since."

Now the little white lie in the preceeding speech might surely be excused. It certainly had its effect, for it put Maude quite at her ease; and so far as he was concerned, all thoughts of the unpleasant episode vanished from her mind.

"Well, have you heard yet from those lawyers you wrote to?" he asked. "You know—Jacobs and Levy, to whom I recommended you?"

"Ah, yes!" she replied, and her countenance fell; "I heard this morning. I am sorry to say they have been unable to discover the slightest trace of that of which I sought to know everything. Do you know, I was going to ask your advice on the subject, but—"

"But what?" he asked, noticing that she hesitated, and was embarrassed. "I hope you believe Miss Luton, that I would assist you in any way in my power, whether with advice or otherwise."

"Yes, yes! I know that. You are very kind; but there are such circumstances in the case as to make it very difficult for me Mr. Davenport. Although I sometimes feel as if we had been friends for years, at others I am obliged to remember that our acquaintance has been very short."

"That is a misfortune which time will remove."

"And then I don't know how to begin talking to you

about my business. I am afraid you will laugh at me, and think I am ridiculous and foolish."

"I can promise you I will do nothing of the kind ; and even more I will say in the hope of reassuring you,—I think I know what it is you wish to ascertain, to prove beyond all possible doubt."

"Indeed !" she cried eagerly.

"Yes ; but here comes Mr. Hopton. We will speak of this again—to-morrow, if not to-day."

"Ah, if you really do know, and can help me ! You cannot conceive how thoroughly in earnest I am. I declare to you I will make this the labour of my life. I will succeed—I will prove all ; and what occurred the other day only made me more determined to conquer or die."

She stood before him with hands clasped, her eyes brilliant, her cheek tinged with carnation, her half-open lips revealing the small white teeth, giving to her countenance an eager determined expression, beautiful to look on ; at least so he thought and said to himself that evening, "she certainly is the handsomest and most attractive girl I have ever seen in my life."

The next day Maude had, as it happened, a headache, which fact Davenport, whose keen eyes did not miss much, elicited from her.

"We will not speak of what you were thinking of asking my advice about to day," he said. "Leave it till the day after to-morrow, when I shall be over again. Meanwhile you can think over it."

"Did you not say," she asked timidly, "that you thought you knew what my object was."

"Yes," he replied. "I will tell you this much ; I



think it relates to your mother—to her unhappy marriage.”

“Yes, yes!” she cried eagerly; “you are quite right. I assure you my thoughts are on that subject night and day.”

“Well, we will talk about that when I come again. I hope, and have no doubt, that your headache will have by that time disappeared.”

“I hope so—it is very tiresome. David was going to drive me over to-day to see the park and grounds of Holford Hall. They say they are very beautiful.”

And here she coloured suddenly, as the thought rushed across her mind that by right all should have been hers. She caught Davenport’s glance, as he curiously regarded her; and when their eyes met, she blushed to the roots of her hair. She feared that he had divined her thoughts—that he knew that at the moment, it was not her own or her mother’s fair fame of which she was thinking, but the stately hall and broad domains of Holford—the rich possessions out of which she was unjustly kept; hers by right as was the name of De Vere, which she would yet honestly and defiantly bear. She little knew then how strangely her wish would be fulfilled, and in what a different manner from that which she thought of.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

## AN EXTRAORDINARY MISTAKE.

ON the following afternoon Sydney Davenport started off with rod, line, basket, and all a fisherman's requisites, across the meadow down to the silvery stream. He resolved on this occasion to avail himself of the permission he had received, and cross in the punt to the beautiful grounds on the other side. After trying a few casts without success, he did so, and landed on the domain of Holford Hall.

First he devoted his attention solely to fishing; but the day was a bright sunshiny one,—and as a consequence, the wary trout were not to be lured from their cool retreats.

So after an hour's unsuccessful toil he, for a time, gave it up, and strolled about under the shade of an avenue of chestnut-trees. Presently in the course of his ramble, he came to a small artificial lake, spanned by a light iron bridge. The approach to this bridge on either side was luxuriant with valuable shrubs, and all the banks of the piece of water were covered and in parts overshadowed by box and yew-trees. The sun was fast declining in the west; and this spot was so delightfully cool, and picturesque, as at once to excite his admiration.

Seating himself by the side of the bridge, shaded by branches from the sun he looked along the placid water away towards the sloping park-glades, and thought how calm, still, and beautiful everything was. Then for the first

time he felt some of the pleasure which the owner of a magnificent country-seat might experience. His own home was old fashioned, and there was nothing beautiful about the grounds; but here no art seemed to have been spared to render the place lovely.

Presently he fell into a reverie and was aroused with a start, at the sound of a pebble dropped in the water. Rising to his feet, he saw standing on the bridge, leaning on the parapet, and gazing intently at the water, a young lady dressed in black. Her figure seemed familiar to him, and just at that moment she turned and saw him. Then he felt certain.

"Maude!" he exclaimed, involuntarily using her Christian name. She looked hard at him, and at first did not reply. "Who would have thought of seeing you here?" he went on. "Ah! I remember,—you spoke yesterday of coming over."

"Sir?" there was something in the accent and voice which startled him. "I don't remember to have seen you before, although you seem to know me. My name is certainly Maude; but—but—"

"I beg pardon,—I see I have made a mistake," Davenport faltered, now slowly and with difficulty coming to a knowledge that there was some mistake.

It took a very hard look to convince him that it was not Maude Luton; but soon he observed that this young lady was a little smaller, slighter, and paler. Almost instantly, however, he became aware of the truth. This girl whom he had taken for Maude Luton was really Maude de Vere, the heiress of Holford Hall.

"Ah! I perceive," she said—and he noticed that the

voice was different—"you have mistaken me for some one else of the same name. That is singular too."

"Very singular," he replied. "You certainly bear a great resemblance to Miss Maude Luton."

"Maude Luton!" she cried, quite joyfully. "You mean the cousin of Mr. David Luton, the doctor who so kindly and skilfully attended me? So she is like me, is she? I long to make her acquaintance, and must make him bring her over. You are a friend of theirs I suppose?"

"I am; and it is by your kind permission, Miss de Vere I am here. Mr. David Luton asked your permission for me to cross to your grounds, and I received a most prompt and courteous reply."

"You are Mr. Davenport then? You see I do not forget everything, although my masters do complain so of my memory. I am glad to have met you. If you will walk with me, I will show you all over the grounds."

"Willingly," he said. "They seem very beautiful and extensive."

"Oh, yes; very beautiful, and very large—too large, and too lonely. Oh, you don't know how lonely this great beautiful place is." She spoke in a tone of childish complaint which he could not but notice, and which struck him as very singular."

Presently she saw some deer among the trees, and, producing some biscuit, she darted off to feed them, and returned in a minute or two, breathless from running. As she came up to him, he had an excellent opportunity of observing her and comparing her with Maude Luton, for whom he had mistaken her.

She was very nearly as tall, slighter built, and more

girlish in appearance ; but this was not so obvious when she was at rest, as he first saw her, as when in motion or speaking. Her face was of the same shape, her features equally regular, but wanting the expression which gave such a charm to Maude Luton. Her eyes too were dark—probably darker than the other's, he thought—and certainly her hair was darker and her eyebrows more clearly marked. She was dressed in deep mourning on account of the death of her grandmother ; and this, and a singular coincidence in the style of dress and bonnet made the likeness at first most striking.

“And so you are lonely even as the mistress of this beautiful place?” he said. “I wonder at that. I should have thought you could have found abundant occupation in the grounds and conservatories,—amusement in the very contemplation of all the grandeur around you.”

“Ah ! but I am dull. We have never been in the habit of having any one here ; and till I am older, you see, I can't do as I like. Grandmamma was always telling me I was a pert child. Did you know grandmamma ?” she suddenly asked.

“No, indeed,—I had not that pleasure.”

“Pleasure ? Ah ! I doubt whether it would have been a pleasure. She was a very disagreeable old lady. I disliked her and she disliked me.” A strange speech for a young lady to make to a stranger about so near a relative he thought ; but of course he kept that thought to himself. “I shall not be here much longer,” she went on ; “and I am really glad of it.”

“Indeed ! are you going to reside elsewhere ?”

“Reside ! Well, not exactly reside ; I am going to

school.—to what they call a *pension* in France ; or perhaps I shall go to a convent,—not to take the veil you know, although I sometimes think that is the happiest life of any. I have read a great deal about the happiness of convent-life. Many of my teachers were Catholics, and they were always bringing me books.

“And did your grandmother allow this sort of thing?”

“Oh, yes,—she did not seem to care ; in fact, I think she rather liked it. She was always particularly attached to Father Ignatius who used to teach me Italian.”

Davenport thought he could here trace symptoms of a desire on the part of her relatives to let this poor friendless girl imbibe an admiration and liking for conventual life. He remembered hearing that her grandmother disliked her by reason of her standing in the light of her surviving son, and he thought it quite possible the old lady wished her to immure herself in a convent and give up all claim to the property to which she was heiress.

“I am going to France, or somewhere on the continent before long.” She went on walking by his side with cast-down eyes, and speaking without any animation. “I suppose I shall know more then about convent life.”

“Ah !” said Davenport to himself, “then she has really thought of this. Poor child ! what a shame to delude her with glowing *couleur-de-rose* pictures of the dreary prisons called convents ! Do you like the thoughts of going to a French *pension* or convent, to complete your education ?”

“Really,” she said, “I don’t know ; I have not thought much about it. I have always heard—I mean for the last year or so—that it was arranged I should, and have looked upon it as a matter-of-course.”

"Clearly a girl easily swayed by the opinions and wishes of others. She would fall readily into the hands of any adventurer—man or woman—who had opportunity of frequently talking to her. It is really a great shame that her education, at least her moral education, has been so disgracefully neglected. She is bordering on womanhood, and absolutely seems to have no idea of thinking or acting for herself." These were Davenport's thoughts.

Shortly after he bade Miss de Vere adieu and returned across the park to the spot where he had left his fishing tackle. But he could not get rid of a feeling of sadness as he thought of this young girl, so wealthy an heiress, and so neglected and uncared for.

"She will become the prey of some fortune-hunting rascal, I suppose," he said to himself, "who will squander her money, and then treat her unkindly. Really she seems quite unfitted for the position she is called upon by birth and fortune to assume."

Then the image of Maude—beautiful, queen-like Maude Luton rose unbidden before him. "Ah!" he thought, "Maude Luton,—now she ought to have been the heiress. How well and how gracefully she would have filled this girl's position? Strange that they should be so like and yet so unlike; so unlike mentally and yet with a striking resemblance of features! They might have been sisters——." Then there darted across his mind Maude Luton's words about being the heiress of Holford Lees and Holford Hall.

"Good heavens!" he said; "this singular likeness between the two girls certainly seems partly to bear out Maude Luton's hypothesis. It seems to me quite possible

that both are the daughters of this Mr. Stanton de Vere, and that Miss Luton is the elder. But as to her being able to prove her mother was legally married to him, that is a very different question ; and even if it be a fact, an extremely difficult one to prove."

On the following afternoon, when he again saw Miss Luton ; he at once told her of his adventure or rather mistake. She seemed deeply interested.

"So she is like me, this Miss de Vere, is she?"

"Very like you. For a moment or two I was completely deceived. Of course when I looked at her and heard her voice, I perceived my mistake."

"And you say she seems a childish, weak-minded girl?"

No, I don't go so far as to say weak-minded ; that is too strong an expression ; but she seems to have been brought up among people who never allowed her to think for herself. Being naturally of an easy, gentle nature, she fell into the way quite naturally—a most unfortunate disposition for an heiress to fifteen or twenty thousand a-year."

"Unfortunate ! Unfortunate does not express it, it is an absurdity, an injustice, a gross wrong—she is not only unfitted by nature for her position, but unendowed even with the right to it. Ah ! but this must and shall be altered."

"Maude had allowed herself to be betrayed into vehemence, and as usual her eyes and the crimson flush on her cheek betrayed it.

"She is much the more beautiful of the two," Sydney Davenport thought ; "more beautiful, more intellectual, more fascinating."

"And now, Miss Luton, about this business you were



going to ask my advice about? I told you that I guessed its nature."

"And you were quite right. Now, the first thing I think to be done is to give you a clear account,—to tell you everything I know, and even everything I suspect myself."

"Quite so, Miss Luton."

Then Maude began, and assisted by notes she had made, told him all that the reader already knows. This she did so clearly and lucidly, that he was enabled at once to grasp the whole affair, and concentrate thereon his more powerful mind.

"I will go for a walk and think over what you have told me," he said; "then I will ask you a few questions perhaps, and give you my opinion; and if you still wish it, advise you how to act." He was gone more than an hour, and at once opened the conversation by saying.

"Miss Luton, I will tell you frankly at once that I think you have a strong case of suspicion; nay more, that you have a right to assume that your mother was married, and probably to this Mr. Stanton de Vere. But the proof is the difficulty; you see it took place twenty years ago, or nearly so. Then too the marriage might have been a Scotch marriage or a private marriage, and all the witnesses may be dead. Again, I repeat that I see great and many difficulties ahead."

"But you do not advise me to desist in my endeavour?"

"I do not. I see that you are earnestly bent on this; and I don't think that you are fickle, or easily turned from your purpose. So I advise you certainly to endeavour to

ascertain the facts, and to keep on trying till there is no reasonable hope of success."

"And then?—what then?" she said sadly.

"Why, then, of course, as a sensible person, you would give it up. What person would persevere when there is no longer a reasonable hope?"

"But I will never believe that there is no hope. I would rather die than give up. I feel—I know that I am right; and I will gain my end."

"You are ardent and enthusiastic; nor can I blame you. And now to business. Let me see the letter of these lawyers in reply to yours."

"Here is the second one I received—to the same purport as the first, but if anything, alas, more discouraging."

"Messrs. Jacobs and Levy have to inform their client, M. S., that they have caused diligent inquiries to be made in Kilmarnock and the neighbourhood, and also have caused search to be made in every possible way for evidence of a documentary nature, with the following result: There is no information touching the marriage of a Mr. Stanton de Vere with a Miss Maude Luton, or with any person whatever, in that part of the kingdom. But they have discovered the registry of the marriage of a Mr. Stanton de Vere with one Adelina Dorée in London, in the year 18—. They have also discovered that a gentleman named Stanton de Vere met his death by accident near Holford Hall about a year after this marriage. But no trace of Mr. de Vere or of Miss Luton, to whom he was supposed to be married, can be discovered at or near Kilmarnock. If any other particulars can be furnished, further inquiries may

be prosecuted ; at present Messrs. Jacobs and Levy regret to announce their inability to throw any light on the subject, and enclose a bill of costs and expenses incurred amounting to 41*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.* A reply to this letter, with fresh instructions, will receive instant attention, or the balance of the sum paid on account will be returned.

D. GOODMAN,

(for Messrs. Jacobs and Levy)."

"What do you think of this letter?" Maude asked anxiously.

"I think it proves that they have done their best, and failed. You did not tell them anything of Mr. De Vere's second marriage?"

"Not a word."

"Well, you see, in the course of their researches they discovered that ; also the fact of his having died a violent death."

"Yes, I think you are right; and now I want your advice."

"At present I scarcely know what to say ; the only thing I can suggest is to try again. Have you any other clue whatever than this name—Kilmarnock?"

"No, none of any value ; but Kilmarnock I have found on several scraps of paper ; and I feel sure that *that* is the place to search for information."

"Very Well," answered Davenport decisively ; "then we will try again."

"Write to those lawyers, and tell them to institute some more strict inquiry?" she asked rather dolefully.

"No, I will go myself," he said ; "there is capital salmon-fishing in the neighbourhood. I will spend a fortnight there, and combine business with pleasure."

"Oh, Mr. Davenport, I cannot think of putting you to such trouble and expense: it would be selfish and wrong of me."

"Miss Luton, you asked my advice, and having done so, are bound to take it. Besides, I should like the change."

Maude's feeble protestations availed nothing against his strong will; and not without a secret pleasure she gave her assent. His last words to her before starting revived her drooping hopes:

"If any information is to be obtained I will have it. I will spare no trouble, rest assured. You do not know perhaps what a difference it makes in the chances of success whether an undertaking be intrusted to one personally interested, or an agent. I don't mean to insinuate for a moment that the lawyers have not done their best—that is to say, employed the best possible agents—but there is an old saying, 'If you want a thing done, order your trusty servant to do it: if you want it done *well*, do it yourself.'"

And so, without further opposition on her part, it was settled that he should himself start in the course of a week and see what he could do. She agreed with him that at present it was as well not to worry David, who had plenty of other things to think of.

When Sydney Davenport had gone, Maude felt rather lonely at first and missed him sadly. But this gave way to eager and hopeful expectation of his success. Without her knowing it, Davenport was gaining a great ascendancy over her. It would have been indeed unnatural, after his kindness and willingness to oblige, if she had not felt some interest. Unconsciously, day by day, this interest deepen-

ed and altered in its nature. For the first time in her life she felt a pang of jealousy one day when Tom Hopton had mentioned him in connection with the daughter of the physician with whom all three had pursued their early studies. She was a very handsome girl, he said ; and she and Sydney used to flirt, and in fact seemed in love with each other.

"Of course, then," said Tom Hopton, "any idea of marriage was out of the question ; but now that he is rich and prosperous, very likely they would make a match of it. She was very fond of Sydney—she was a jolly girl ; and I know he received a letter from her the other day, because she sent her kind remembrances to me." All this Mr. Hopton said very innocently, not dreaming that he was giving Miss Luton acute pain.

And why should she feel pained and miserable on hearing Mr. Davenport coupled with another ? The only answer she could find was by indignantly denying to herself that she was so grieved ; at least she tried to persuade herself so. She did not care in the least degree, she said. What had it to do with her ?

But nevertheless in her inmost heart she did care ; and that silent monitor (call it conscience, or what you will) continually told her so. She became restless and uneasy—partly from not hearing any account of the success or failure of his efforts in her behalf, but partly also through not hearing from *himself* ; putting aside his mission to Scotland on her service altogether.

"David," she said, one evening at the tea-table, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, "I wish you would drive me over to Holford Hall. I should like to see the place, and

the grounds, and above all, this young heiress, Miss de Vere?" David assented at once, as he had already received invitations to bring her over. He thought not for a moment what it was which caused this new whim.

Maude, however, deep down in her soul, had a reason. She seldom did anything without one. She remembered that in the scheme she had daawn up she had put down as plan *three* to cultivate the acquaintance of this young lady. and gain from her all she knew of her father's history—his habits and his haunts. Then too, she might get a sight at papers, documents, letters, which would prove all she wanted. She had often read of marriage-certificates and things of that sort which were required to substantiate a title or claim, being found by accident when every possible effort had failed. Davenport might fail utterly; it was possible—nay, even probable. But who could say, if she cultivated the friendship of Miss De Vere, that she might not suddenly stumble on the very information she sought? A piece of crumpled paper, or a letter in an old desk, might at once throw a light on all this mystery, and result in her triumphant restoration to her rights as "heiress of Holford Hall." Thus argued Maude Luton; and she clung to the idea almost with the persistency of a monomaniac.

David Luton felt a simple sort of pride in driving over his beautiful cousin, and introducing her to Miss De Vere; for it was he who had obtained the invitation. In the course of his professional visits, which had amounted to a good number, he had acquired a tolerable knowledge of the park and grounds; and after driving in through the old wooden gates, he occupied himself in pointing out the beauties and prominent features.

"See," he said, "there is a noble avenue of oak-trees. It leads down to the artificial lake ; and yet, though the timber is more valuable, it seems to me that the broad avenue we come to presently, which is composed exclusively of elm-trees, exceeds it in grandeur. An old oak-tree does not impress me with the sense of venerable antiquity which the elm does. The oak is a strong, sturdy tree, thrusting its great arms out defiantly in all directions ; but for picturesqueness of outline and colour, or rather light and shade, give me the elm."

"Why, David," said Maude, "I never heard you talk in that way before ; I thought you had no eye for the beautiful—no thought but for science and your pet theories."

"Well, you know," he said, laughing good-humouredly, "I thought so myself ; but the other day Miss De Vere happened to mention that they thought of cutting down the 'Shady Walk.' That is what they call the 'Oak-tree Avenue,' I have just shown you."

"Cut it down !" cried Maude, passionately ? cut down those dear old trees ! The thought is monstrous. It shall not be. What could have put it into the head of Miss De Vere ?"

"Oh, it was not her idea, I assure you. I felt as you feel,—that it would be a shame, a desecration ; and expressed my feelings."

"And what did she say ?"

"She is as docile as a child and at once fell in with my view. 'I will speak about it,' she said, 'and ask them not to do it.'"

"Ask them not to do it ! What does the girl mean ! Surely they would never do it without her consent !"

"You see, Maude," replied David, "she has all her life been accustomed to rely upon others. She never seems to think even for herself; and as to acting, it is out of the question, unless anything is placed before her in its true light by some one in whom she has confidence and whom she likes. I think I may say without vanity that such is the case with regard to myself."

"And you say she is very docile and easily led?"

"Yes, to a degree. I am convinced that if she liked any one,—who had once accustomed her to yield,—she would do so continually, nor think of resisting the friendly influence. But don't misunderstand me; when she takes it into her head, she can be very determined and obstinate, I am sure. I saw her the next day, and she herself spoke on the subject of the Oak Avenue. It seems that the London lawyer—now her only surviving guardian—has put a man here as agent or steward to look after the estates. 'I saw Mr. Waters yesterday,' she said to me, 'and told him that I would not have the oaks cut down—not a single tree should be touched. He replied that he had orders from my guardian to do so. I said I would write at once, and told him to write also, and say I refused to allow it—that I dared him to do it—and to put at the end of the letter that if such a thing were attempted, I would myself set fire to the Hall, and burn it to the ground.' Her eyes flamed quite fiercely, and she trembled with excitement as she spoke. I really felt quite alarmed by her strange manner. She looked as if she meant what she said, and would do it."

"Burn the Hall down!" exclaimed Maude,—“what an insane what a mad speech!"



"Yes," said David gravely; "and for a moment or two she looked like a mad woman, instead of that quiet passive girl she usually is."

Maude remained in silent thought for a moment or two; then said, "And all this storm, David, was on account of what you said."

"It would seem so."

"She likes you; and because the agent seemed inclined to act against her wish, or rather your wish, in the matter, she flew into this violent rage!"

"Really, Maude, you are quite driving me up into a corner. I assure you I had no intention of so exciting her or even influencing her when I spoke. What I said was merely intended as casual conversation."

"She took it seriously to heart, however, David, do you think," she asked, turning suddenly towards him, "that she would so act in regard to any body whom she liked?"

"I am sure she would; she is just the sort of girl to go through fire and water for a person whom she loved and looked up to. I feel certain that if any one once gained an influence over her mind, it would be all-powerful—impossible to counteract it."

"And do you think she will like me?" Maude asked, dreamily.

"Like you? Of course she will; how can she help it?" he replied simply. "Doesn't everybody like you? I have never seen much of you till lately, and I liked you from the first day you came. Tom Hopton likes you; Sydney Davenport likes you; everybody likes you."

"You dear, simple old David," she said, and laughed a low musical little laugh—"you shouldn't flatter."

"Ah! but I don't flatter."

"Well, well," she replied, "I withdraw the accusation; but do you think Sydney Davenport likes me?" she asked, looking at him askance with her bright eyes.

"Yes, I know he does; but he doesn't flatter you, I can tell you. He speaks his mind quite plainly."

Maude's curiosity was piqued. She could, she knew, elicit anything from her cousin, and determined to do it. "What on earth has he been saying about me? Something dreadful, I suppose."

"Oh, no. He praises you—says you're a clever girl, and a beautiful girl, and all that sort of thing, you know; but he thinks you are passionate and head-strong."

"And is that all?"

"Well, not exactly all; he says there is something in your disposition he can't make out—something hidden down deep in your heart—something in your nature, in fact, not—not—not——"

"Not what?" she asked impatiently. "Why don't you speak out, David? How stupid you are!"

"Well, something not pleasant—not right. He says, to put it in his own words, that you are a jewel of the first water, but not without a flaw. Ah! now I remember his exact words. He said, 'THERE'S A FLAW IN THE GEM.'"

"Oh, indeed!" she replied, with real or affected scorn.

"So Mr. Sydney Davenport presumes to criticise my character in that manner, does he? I wonder he did not compare me at once to damaged goods, or give some other witty and polite simile. A flaw in the gem indeed!"

Maude felt and looked angry; but on David trying to

soothe her, she indignantly denied it. "Oh, don't fancy I care what he said. It is only the impertinence of his presuming to make remarks about me at all which caused me to speak sharply. I am absolutely indifferent as to the opinions of Mr. Sydney Davenport."

False, Maude!—utterly false! Vainly do you try to persuade yourself it is as you say. You do care and cannot disguise from yourself that you care. As they drove up to the door, the words kept echoing through her brain, and she half muttered, "A flaw in the gem!"

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## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE PICTURE GALLERY.

ALTHOUGH the Hall was now tenanted only by the young girl who was to be its future mistress, a ceremonious state was kept up. It had been always so in the old lady's time, and no one—least of all Maude de Vere—thought of altering it now. A footman in livery walked down the steps. The Hall-porter stood at the door; and as David and his cousin ascended, a most respectable-looking old person made his appearance, having been summoned from his room. This old man was the butler; and on no occasion did he neglect to attend when visitors drove up.

David was well known, and nodding to the servants in his familiar kindly manner, he asked of the old man—"Is Miss de Vere within?"

"My young mistress, Dr. Luton, is about the grounds; but if you walk into the drawing-room, she shall be sent for at once. James, show this lady and gentleman into the drawing-room. Thomas, go seek Miss de Vere, and inform her of her visitors." The words addressed to Thomas were accompanied by a magnificent wave of the hand round the grounds. If it were intended to denote where Miss de Vere was to be found, it might be as vague and at the same time as full of hidden meaning, as Lord Burleigh's nod.

Maude moved across the wide hall, with its glistening

marble-pavement, and entered the grandly furnished drawing-room with an air as though she had been accustomed to it all her life. Even the old butler was impressed by her self-possessed aristocratic manner.

"I wonder who she can be. A nob evidently, by her style," he said to the porter.

"She's in mourning, like the Doctor. Perhaps she's a relation of his."

"Saunders my good man," said the higher functionary, "don't make such a fool of yourself. Do you think I, who have been all my life in the best of families, don't know real high-breeding when I see it? She's a lady born and bred, and has evidently moved in the highest circles."

Although the speaker was in this instance wrong, it did no discredit to his discernment; for assuredly, had Maude been a duke's daughter, and accustomed to consort only with the first aristocracy in the land, she could not have been more refined, self-possessed, and, as it were, proudly conscious of her superiority to the ordinary run of mortals.

While awaiting the arrival of Miss de Vere, David endeavoured to excite her admiration and wonder by pointing out to her, the costly furniture and ornamentation of the room. Her eye wandered over all without astonishment; her face bore an expression of placid approval only, as though she had been always surrounded by blue-and-gold damask, rich velvet couches, enormous mirrors, Sevres china, and inlaid cabinets.

They had not waited more than five minutes ere Miss de Vere entered—a straw-hat trimmed with black in her hand—flushed and panting from exertion.

"I am so glad to see you doctor," she said; and then

turned timidly to Maude, who regarded her with an absorbing look, as though she would take in everything at once, and read her very soul with that one first glance.

"This is my cousin, Miss Maude Luton," said David. "Maude, this is Miss de Vere." The two girls were now face to face, and remained so for a time, after they had shaken hands and the usual compliments passed.

Anyone regarding them as they stood—the same side-light from the window falling on each—could not but have been struck by the likeness which had for a moment or two, deceived Sydney Davenport. Both were in mourning,—Miss de Vere wearing a dress of rich black velvet, while Maude Luton's was of plain silk. The latter was perhaps a shade taller, and her figure was more rounded and developed. Miss de Vere's hair was a shade darker, as were her eyes, and her eyebrows thicker and approaching nearer together. Both were well and gracefully formed, the features of each were equally good; but there was a very great difference in the carriage especially of the head. Maude Luton looked decidedly the more queenly of the two, her every motion being replete with dignity and grace; while with the heiress, though she too was graceful, there was wanting that staid dignity, amounting at times to haughtiness of demeanour. This was further to be observed in the expression of the features. Maude Luton was graver; and though her countenance changed with the varying emotions which at the time might affect her, the changes were not so quick, capricious, or so marked as with Miss De Vere. A word would bring a blush to the face of the latter—a thought shooting through her mind

would instantly paint itself on her face. It was when she looked grave and thoughtful as Davenport had first seen her, that the resemblance between the two girls was most striking. When she was gay or laughing, there was scarce anything in common between them.

Maude De Vere, in face, expression and manner, seemed the impersonation of child-like innocence and trusting love. She seemed like a tender creeping plant, longing for some stronger nature to which to cling. Maude Luton, though little more than a year older, was, in comparison, an experienced woman. She not only looked more womanly, but felt so. She had all a woman's instincts and feelings for good and evil; all a woman's jealousies and heart-burnings; and all a woman's steadfastness of purpose.

Almost at once the stronger mind asserted its sway; and Miss De Vere unconsciously behaved and spoke to her visitor as though she herself were the inferior, and not the heiress of Holford Hall.

"Should you like to see over the house, Miss Luton? Two-thirds of it is unoccupied. I can't think why people build such great dismal places."

"Surely," said David, looking at the splendidly-appointed room, "you do not call this dismal?"

"Indeed I do though. You don't know how heartily tired I am of everything here. I wish sometimes that I was poor and lived in a cottage—in a hut—anything but this weary great Hall."

An expression of sorrowful astonishment came over Maude Luton's handsome face. She did not express her thoughts, however, but said merely, in reply to Miss de

Vere's first question : I should very much like to see the picture-gallery."

The countenance of her young hostess fell, and a perceptible shudder crept over her. "Oh, that dismal great corridor ! It gives me the horrors when I think of it : I never pass through it."

"It does not matter," replied the surgeon's niece coldly "only I should have liked to have seen the pictures."

"Oh, Miss Luton, don't think me rude or unkind ; I will gladly show you over the gallery. It is very foolish of me I know, to dislike it, but I really cannot help it."

"But Miss de Vere, we will not trouble you," said David Luton. "If you will direct one of the servants to show me and my cousin the way, it will do quite as well."

"By no means, David ; I should not enjoy it a bit unless Miss de Vere were there to explain to me and tell me the history of the various portraits of the ancestral De Veres."

"I tell you the history of them ! I declare to you I scarcely know them by name:—yes, I think I do know their names. Grandmama was always talking about them ; and though I took no interest in it, I could not avoid remembering something. I will do my best. Come, Miss Luton, I will show you the way."

Taking hold of our heroine's hand, she led her away, much as a child would an old man, along a broad but gloomy passage ; they went up a flight of stairs, and finally emerged into a large well-lighted room, with folding doors at the other end.

"This is called the antechamber," she said ; "I really



don't know why. Help me to open the doors ; they are so heavy and stiff." Between them they opened the great door, and entered a long, low, and ill-lighted corridor or gallery.

"Oh! what a shame to hang the pictures in a place like this!" exclaimed Maude Luton.

"Is it not dark and dreary? This is part of the old Hall. The other wing and centre were altered and improved fifty years ago, but this part remains as it has been for centuries, I believe—dark, badly lighted by small windows, and altogether odious. For my part, I should never wish to enter it; indeed I think it ought to be pulled down, for it is quite useless."

"Pulled down! What sacrilege! Destroy this monument of venerable antiquity—the very cradle of our ancient family!"

David Luton looked astonished. *Our* ancient family! What could she mean? Miss de Vere did not notice the expression, however; but Maude observed her cousin's wondering look, and, spite of her self control, she felt the blood rush to her face. The young heiress led the way along the gallery, which became darker as they receded further from the well-lighted antechamber.

"This," she said, pointing to a stern dark-looking man in half-armour, "is Sir Bradley de Vere. He was knighted by King Henry the Eighth on the field of the Cloth-of-Gold. He was, I believe, a great warrior, and laid the foundation at least of the wealth of the family."

"And who is this?" asked her visitor, stopping before a portrait of a richly attired man, in the costume of Charles the Second's reign.

"That is Mordred de Vere. He was forced to fly the country at the close of the civil wars which ended in the Commonwealth. On the Restoration he returned, and resumed possession of his estates and ancestral home."

These two portraits were the only two which attracted Maude Luton's attention. Towards the end of the room, however, and facing a small mullioned window, there was one which was covered by a black curtain.

"And this?" she asked,— "this one so carefully veiled?"

"Ah!" replied Miss de Vere, shudderingly, "do not look at that. Let us come away."

But her voice and manner only inflamed Maude's curiosity; and advancing, she slowly drew on one side the curtain, which moved freely on brass rods. She saw the portrait of a handsome dark young man, dressed in modern costume. Beneath it, in black letters on the gilt frame, were the words, *Stanton de Vere*.

"And this is my father!" murmured Maude, gazing earnestly on it. Miss de Vere had shrunk away and joined David, so she could examine it undisturbed. Maude herself could not but be struck by the strong likeness between the portrait, herself, and Miss de Vere. Each had the same regular handsome features, dark hair and complexion. But the eyes of Stanton de Vere, even on the canvas, seemed to gleam with a sombre light; there was a wild half-fierce expression in the countenance, which had been happily seized by the painter.

She could guess why the portrait was kept veiled. There was sufficient rumour and talk as to the way he had met with his death to render it unpleasant to have his

name even mentioned. His mother, who had always preferred the younger son, had caused this curtain to be placed in front of the picture, and not only forbade it to be withdrawn, but discountenanced as far as possible any visits to the gallery.

Miss de Vere knew not the whole facts. She knew that her father had been accidentally killed; also that a dark shadow hung about his memory. To her ears the ominous word suicide had never been breathed; and her shrinking dread at unveiling the picture was more a matter of instinct and tradition than aught else. Maude Luton, when she had gazed so long at the picture that she could not continue to do so without being obviously rude, slowly drew the curtain and rejoined her companions.

David now declared that he must leave, as he had a great many patients to visit, and it was getting late in the afternoon. Maude was about bidding farewell, in that queenly, dignified manner all her own, when the heiress interrupted impatiently—

“No, no, Dr. Luton” (she always called him doctor), “you shall not take Miss Luton away. She has not seen half over the place yet; and though it is dreary and common-place, and dreary enough to me, it seems to amuse her. You go and attend to your patients; she shall stop and dine with me, and I will drive over with her in the evening in the carriage. You will stay, will you not, dear?”

“Maude smiled graciously at her hostess’s warm manner of addressing her, but at once assented unconditionally. “Yes, cousin,” she said to David, “I think I will accept Miss De Vere’s offer. I should very much like to see more

of the beauties of this glorious old place." Thus it was settled ; and David drove off, leaving the two Maudes together.

The afternoon, until dinner-time which was five o'clock, they passed strolling about the grounds, the conservatories, and the gardens. Maude Luton saw that everything was admirably conducted ; and knowing even what little she did of the character of the young heiress, she at first wondered a little. But this surprise was dissipated when she learned that all went on exactly as before the death of the old lady, who had ordained everything, and instituted a strict and severe system—a system in which the utmost minutiae were attended to, and in which expense was quite a secondary consideration.

The two girls dined together in a small room called the breakfast-parlour, waited upon by two gorgeous footmen and the respectable butler. Shortly they became on excellent terms,—or rather Miss De Vere did, for she seemed to take Maude Luton to her heart at once and for ever ; to seize upon her as does the ivy upon the oak ; to yearn for her love and sympathy as does the thirsty traveller for water.

Now Maude Luton, although she was not unaffected by the obvious liking this gentle innocent girl had for her,—the readiness with which she succumbed to her will as the price of her friendship (a dozen trifling instances of which, occurred during the few hours they were together)—yet kept her grand purpose in view. She had determined to cultivate the acquaintance and friendship of the heiress, if possible. In that she had already succeeded, for the lovely gentle girl, as it were, rushed into her arms. But

there yet remained the object with which she had made her acquaintance ; and that was, as the reader knows, to discover all she could respecting the unfortunate Stanton De Vere. At the moment of which we speak, that alone was her object. How it developed itself, and grew from a small cloud to overwhelming proportions, carrying even herself away, will be developed in the course of the story.

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## CHAPTER XX.

## THE TWO MAUDES.

ON the following day Maude Luton received a letter from Sydney Davenport. The news he sent was discouraging. Up to the date of his writing he had been unable to discover anything respecting the marriage. He could not even learn that such a person as Stanton De Vere had ever been known at Kilmarnock, though he had tried every hotel and inn, and hunted up old and superannuated waiters. Still he said he would persevere for another week, and then hoped to be able to send a better account. Maude sat at the window of her room gazing out, with the open letter lying in her lap.

"Failure ! failure !" she murmured. "I fear there is no hope of anything in that quarter. It seems as though my first plan was destined to be unsuccessful. There remain the second and third. The second does not seem promising, but the third—ah ! the third—there I see my way—a gleam of light seems to dissipate the sombre mist. If she knows anything—if she can furnish any information, it is mine ; of that I feel assured. I will go over to-morrow. She asked me to come and stay a week. Why should I not ?"

Maude was always prompt in making up her mind ; and that evening at tea-time she addressed her cousin ; "David,

Miss De Vere has asked me to spend a week with her. I think I will go to-morrow."

"As you please, Maude. But is not this rather a sudden resolve?"

"Perhaps so. I see no good in being days and weeks in making up your mind. She asked me yesterday, and to-day I thought I would accept; that is to say, of course, if you have no objection."

"I! bless my soul, no. We shall miss you, of course, very much; but as it will give you pleasure, I am most happy for you to go." Accordingly the next afternoon Maude Luton was again a guest at Holford Hall. The heiress welcomed her with the utmost warmth and cordiality; and it was easy to see she was really delighted at her visit.

"Oh, this is kind of you, Miss Luton," she said; "do you know, when I asked you, I scarcely thought you would come to this dreary dull place. I was afraid you would not care to leave your cousin to come here."

Maude laughed her low, flute-like, silvery laugh, and replied, "My dear Miss De Vere, you can't think how delighted I am to accept your kind invitation. This beautiful place seems a perfect paradise to me; and as to being dull, we will find plenty of occupation and amusement. Remember, I have not seen half the grounds and gardens yet. Then there is the park and plantations, the little lake, and the clear river where Mr. Davenport used to catch the trout."

"Ah, Mr. Davenport, I forgot you knew him. Is he not handsome—so grandly handsome? He is quite my ideal of a man. Elegant, well-formed, and with such a

charming, grave, quiet manner ! I hope he will come here soon. Is he still in the neighbourhood ?”

“ No ; he has gone to Scotland,” said Maude, coldly ; for she did not like to hear this girl praise her friend so enthusiastically. She remembered how kindly and pityingly he had spoken of the lovely, forlorn heiress, and felt a pang of jealousy. And yet she tried to persuade herself that she cared not one iota for this man.

“ Has he gone on business or pleasure ?” pursued Miss De Vere.

“ Pleasure,” replied Maude ; “ at least pleasure combined with a little business.”

“ And when does he return ?”

“ He did not say in his letter, but I expect in about a week.”

“ Oh, then you have heard from him ?”

Our heroine did not mean to reveal this fact, and did so quite from absence of mind. She now changed the subject, which she found more difficulty in doing than she expected ; for the thoughts of her young hostess seemed to dwell very much on this Sydney Davenport, greatly to Maude’s annoyance.

“ I expect he’s been talking sentimental nonsense to her,” she thought. “ Perhaps although he is rich, he would have no objection to add the Holford-estate’s rent to his own roll.” That she did him gross injustice is quite certain. Sydney Davenport was certainly the last man in the world to marry for money.

“ Come, dear, let us go into the conservatory,—I am so fond of flowers.”

The heiress led the way, and our heroine followed, chew-



ing the cud of bitter reflection. She felt dissatisfied with herself—more so with Davenport, and positively angry with the young girl by her side. This last was most unjust, as Maude de Vere had done nothing by word or deed to offend. She had sense enough, however, to conquer this ill-feeling, well aware that to lose her temper was not the way to gain her point. From the conservatory, where bloomed the choicest English flowers and the rarest exotics, they strolled together on to the lawn.

“Come up on the balcony,” said the heiress, “and I will show you my own little room. This is the only way to it. Don’t you think it very clever of me? I can assure you I am quite charmed with the idea.”

Ascending half a dozen iron steps, they stood on the balcony, on to which the windows of the dining, drawing, and other rooms opened. Miss de Vere led the way past the drawing-room windows, and pausing opposite one, overgrown and shaded with creeping plants, produced a small key, unlocked the window, and entered.

“I have fastened the door on the inside, so that the only way in here is by the balcony. It is charming. No one can disturb me when I wish to be alone.”

“But who is there to disturb you at any time?”

“Oh, the servants; they worry me dreadfully. First one comes and wishes to know if I will have the carriage out; then the head gardener comes about something or other; then the old butler is always wanting to know if I expect company—when I will please to dine; then there’s the housekeeper—she is the most dreadful worry of them all. But when once I am in here I am safe. They all know that the door is fastened, and of course none of them

dare come through the drawing-room, and out on the balcony, and so capture me."

Maude Luton laughed with genuine amusement at this almost childish trick on the part of her who should be undisputed mistress. "How easily I would alter that if I were mistress," she said to herself. "I fancy I see myself being annoyed by servants!"

But though she laughed at the girl's childish glee at having thus provided herself with a retreat, she could not help admiring the tastefulness and comfort of this her little boudoir. The walls were panelled, and each panel contained a landscape or picture set in the centre—set as if in an oak frame. The furniture was all of rosewood, as were a small piano and harmonium, facing each other. A semi-circular couch was drawn with its back close against the door, and on either side of the window was a low easy chair. On a small table in the centre, were books, writing materials, and a stand of flowers. A vase of water, standing in a small ice-cooler, was on the sideboard; and there were several plates of fresh fruit.

"You see I keep biscuits, and fruit, and wine for a friend in this "sanctum" of mine. I do not drink wine myself, but that is no reason you should not have a glass. Here is port, sherry, and madeira. The madeira the butler tells me is not to be matched in England. Are they not dear little decanters?"

Maude expressed her admiration, which was genuine, of them and of the glasses—all of which were of Lilliputian size and the most exquisite finish. The furniture was all modern, with the exception of an old Chinese-looking cabinet studded all over with brass, which stood in one

corner. On this our heroine at once fixed her attention. "What a curious old cabinet!"

"Yes, it is rather out of place here; but it was in the room when I had it done up, so I let it remain. Grand-mama wished it; and as giving me liberty to do as I liked with this room,—have it furnished exactly as I pleased,—was one of the very few acts of kindness she ever bestowed on me, of course I consented to let it remain, and should not think of having it removed now."

"What does it contain?"

"Oh, nothing but old papers and parchments, and rubbish. I never look into it." She sank her voice and added, "it belonged to poor papa."

Maude Luton's eyes gleamed with a sudden fire. Here perhaps was what she sought. Who could say that in that cabinet the evidence for which she so yearned might not be found? A silence succeeded. Maude was communing with herself—struggling with temptation. With the facilities she had, how easy it would be to come alone to this little room during the absence of Miss de Vere and ransack this cabinet to her heart's content! But her soul revolted at the meanness and treachery such an act would involve. The thought of abusing the rights of hospitality, taking advantage of this innocent girl's liking for herself to pry into her private room, was hateful to her, and she dismissed the idea. It is only by slow and insensible degrees that an originally noble mind can be brought to do anything shabby or dishonourable. Assuredly Maude's mind was at first pure and noble. How far it might be able to resist temptation and corrupting influences yet remains to be proved. There was one other thing in

the room which struck her as very strange : in a little niche or shrine there was a silver image of our Saviour on the cross. Beneath there hung a rosary and crucifix.

" Ah ! " said her companion, bowing her head reverently, " you are looking at my shrine. I pray before it every day. Do you know I am more than half a Roman Catholic ? "

" Indeed ! "

" Yes, I have seen so much of the holy men of that Holy Church,—I have heard so much of the Blessed Virgin,—I long sometimes, when I am dull and melancholy, to become a nun, and devote my life to the service of God. The good priest who was here, has left now. I believe my surviving guardian objected to him. Grand-mama never did, but rather encouraged me to pursue my studies with him,—he was such a good man ; so gentle, kind, and charitable. He used to say that all the good qualities he possessed were due entirely to the influence of the Holy Catholic faith on his soul. But he has left me some books,—some beautiful books,—full of prayers, and songs, and chaunts. I can play on the harmonium, but I cannot sing. Can you sing, my dear ? "

" Oh yes," replied Maude Luton.

" Oh, that is glorious ! Will you sing one of those chaunts, if I play ? "

" Willingly, if it is within the compass of my voice. "

Miss de Vere hastened to the instrument and produced a book of sacred songs with music, such as are sung in Roman Catholic cathedrals. Maude Luton stood by her side ; and as the first notes of the harmonium thrilled on the air, her clear beautiful voice rose and accompanied it

in harmonious unison. The delight of the heiress knew no bounds ; and, when she had finished, she threw her arms round her visitor's neck, and kissing her said, " Oh, Miss Luton, I am so pleased you sing ! I shall love you more than ever now. I may love you, may I not ? " She added, with child-like innocence.

" Certainly ; I shall esteem it an honour, Miss de Vere," replied Maude, smiling.

" Do not talk so coldly, pray, and don't call me Miss De Vere ; I hate it. I feel as though we had been friends for years."

" What shall I call you ? "

" Call me by my name—Maude."

" But my name is Maude too."

" That does not matter. It can never cause any confusion between us. When I say Maude, I shall mean you,—not myself of course ; and when you say Maude, you will mean me."

" Very well Maude," replied our heroine ; " We will let it be so."

" Ah, you dear darling ! Now we will have some lunch, will we not ? " she cried, jumping up and running to the side-board.

She produced fruit, pine apples, melons, grapes, and pears. Then she got out biscuits, preserved prunes, and a silver salver bearing the pretty little decanters and miniature glasses."

" There ! " she cried gleefully ; " Does not that look pretty ? "

Maude Luton readily owned that it did. The table was decked with the finest fruits—peaches, with the delicate

violet bloom, purple grapes, yellow plums, luscious-looking melons ; the centre occupied by a low vase of the choicest flowers.

"I have all these brought fresh into this room every morning. At eleven o'clock I am here myself ; then and after that no one is allowed to enter, or even to come on the balcony—except you, dear," she added quickly, nervously sensitive lest her new friend should take offence.

This light and elegant repast finished, the two girls strolled out together into the magnificent park. Maude Luton, looking around her, could scarcely realise the careless indifference with which the fortunate heiress regarded her wealth and possessions. With bitterness of heart she said to herself, "To think that this girl, who knows not the value of what she possesses who has no pride, no pleasure in this beautiful place, should stand between me and my rights! These broad domains are mine. Apart from right, altogether it is more fit that they should be. Surely I am better adapted to grace a high station, to administer wealth judiciously than this weak girl! And yet I cannot help liking her. Were it not for the constant wrong she is unwittingly doing me, I might even love her."

They had not long wandered together on the grassy slopes, vainly pursuing the beautiful spotted deer, which fled timidly at their approach, when they saw a man-servant coming hastily towards them. They had just paused, out of breath.

"How provoking!" cried Maude Luton. "I had brought some biscuits on purpose to feed them, and the silly shy things run away from us. I suppose you have never fed them?"

"I!—no. I really never thought about it till now. I wish I had. It is capital fun. But I don't know—I don't think I should like it. It is your company, Maude, which makes everything seem bright and pleasant."

The domestic at this moment approached. "If you please, miss, there's Mister Clarke and Miss Clarke come; they want to see you very particularly."

"Oh, bother," said Miss De Vere with more sincerity than elegance. "What can they want with me? Won't Mr. Brown, the steward, do?"

"They have seen him, miss, and now wish particularly to speak to you."

"Oh, dear! I suppose I must go. Come along, Maude."

"Are these the Clarkes of Black-Ash farm?" our heroine asked with obvious interest.

"Yes; the farm belongs to the estate. Mr. Brown has been over it, and says that the rent should be increased,—that it is let for considerably less than its value."

"And is this Miss Clarke who is with the farmer his eldest daughter?"

"I believe so. She came with him once before, and I referred them to the steward. I don't see why I should be troubled with these things. But do you know her, Maude?"

"Know her? I was at school with her. She grossly insulted me, and I *hate* her—the wretch." Maude de Vere paused suddenly, and looked full in her new friend's face.

"She insulted you?" she cried with flashing eyes, "and she is your enemy? Ah! then we will see. I will show you how I vindicate my friends; and I look upon you as a dear friend. I will make Mr. Brown double the rent if

possible. I would turn them out instantly if I had the power ; but unfortunately I have not. My guardian is a very strict severe man ; he told me that during my minority he would administer the estates with strict regard to my interests and to justice. I know he would refuse to turn out a good tenant ; and this Clarke is a very good farmer, I am told. But I influence this agent, steward, or whatever he is, because I can at any moment procure his dismissal ; and I'll do it too, if he thwarts me, or does not do exactly as I order him."

She spoke vehemently, and with unusual determination in look and manner. An angry flush was on her face ; and Maude Luton, noticing these things, said to herself, "There is something in the girl, after all. She speaks and looks like a woman now,—not as usual, like a weak, almost half-witted child."

Some little compunction too, she felt for her former uncharitable thoughts ; and a feeling of regret had place in her heart that in the prosecution of her rights she would be compelled to injure this sincere friend who was so prompt to take up her cause. Together they passed up the steps of the Hall, the porter throwing wide the door, and bowing to his young mistress and her friend.

"Where are those people who wish to see me?" she asked sharply. Saunders who had never heard her speak like that ; was quite astonished ; but replied, "In the little parlour, miss."

"Oh, very well; send them into me to the drawing-room."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Maude Luton.

"Certainly, dear. I wish you to do so, and hear what I say to them."



Then they went together to the great drawing-room. Maude de Vere pulled up the blinds to the top, and drew back the curtains, so as to allow a full light to pour into the room. Then she drew two chairs to the table,—one for herself and one for her friend.

“You sit here close to me, Maude,” she said; “they will be here directly. Please hand me that writing-case; I am going to try to look business-like. How the poor farmer will stare when he hears what I have to say! and won’t he be sorry he ever came to me at all?”

A moment afterwards and the Clarkes were ushered in.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

## DOROTHY CLARKE'S HUMILIATION.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Clarke; be seated, pray," she said to him, taking not the slightest notice of the daughter. As to the latter, so soon as her eye glanced from Miss De Vere to her who was by her side, she flushed up to the temples with anger and mortification. Maude Luton here!—on friendly, even familiar terms with the great heiress. (At that moment the latter leaned towards her friend, and said something in a low voice.) It was odious, and she felt as though she could sink into the ground. To be humiliated before her enemy! how Dolly Clarke hated her at that moment! But her rage was impotent; so with a very ill grace, and looks as black as possible, she drew a chair and seated herself beside her father. Mr. Clarke too looked far from easy; he coughed, twisted his hat about, looked up, coloured, looked down again, and seemed at a loss how to begin. But the necessity of the case gave him courage and urged him on.

The *necessity*, we said—though perhaps, strictly speaking, the matter of a rise in rent would not be absolutely ruinous. Still, however, he held a large farm—no less than four hundred acres,—and a rise of five shillings an acre would make a difference of a hundred pounds a-year. Now Mr. Clarke was not rich, and he had plenty of use for his money; so that though the farm was perhaps strictly

worth the extra rental, he yet hoped to hold it at the same price he had for many years. He had an expensive family of daughters growing up. Now that Miss Dolly had found the finishing school of the Misses Martin was too hot to hold her, she had set her mind on going abroad for a year. That would certainly swallow up as much as the worthy farmer wished to save in rent. Then the other girls too, taking example by their ambitious sister, might also worry him till he sent them to an expensive school. Last, and not least, wheat was only forty shillings a quarter. Alas! Farmer Clarke sighed for the good old times he could remember, when it fetched ninety shillings, and occasionally went up to a hundred. So, for all these reasons, worthy Mr. Clarke meant to protest vehemently against a rise in his rent.

But when he found himself confronted with two young ladies, both dark, handsome, and singularly alike, he felt bewildered. For some little time, however, he was at a loss to know which of the two was the heiress.

Not so, however, with his daughter. Hatred had sharpened her perceptive faculties; and if it had been nearly dark, instead of quite light, it is probable she would have been aware of the presence of her enemy. For a moment or so she thought to brazen it out boldly, to stare defiantly at Maude Luton; but involuntarily her eye quailed, and dropped before the fierce, haughty look of her late schoolfellow. As in position—Maude speaking in a military way, was superior to her—so had the first skirmish resulted in her defeat. There were very few who could meet the steady stare which Maude Luton could bestow—a look at once stony and scornful—which while it made

the farmer's daughter boil with anger, yet compelled her to drop her eyelids. A very slight smile of satisfaction might have been traced on the face of the visitor; but this quickly gave way to one of earnest attention as Miss De Vere spoke.

"You wish to see me, Clarke, on business, I presume."

"Yes miss."

"Is it of such a nature as my steward Mr.——cannot arrange with you?"

Maude Luton listened in mute wonder. Was this girl who spoke calmly and to the purpose, the same as the weak imbecile who a short time previously had asked if she might be permitted to love her? Nothing could be more business-like and decisive than the manner and speech of the young girl; and every word she spoke made it more apparent.

"Well, miss, I have seen him; and he says he don't feel he can do anything. It's about the farm, miss,—a little over four hundred acres,—which I've held of your family for more than twenty years; and my father and grandfather too, they farmed it; and the rent was always the same. And that was in the good times, when wheat fetched a price. It certainly does seem hard, when it's down to something like ten pound a load, that the rent should be raised."

"How much is the present rent?" Miss De Vere asked, taking a pen and a dip of ink, as if about to make a memorandum."

"Thirty-five shillings an acre, miss."

"Only thirty-five shillings! Really it is very little for such excellent land."

"Ah ! but, miss, you must remember I've farmed it carefully, and spared neither labour nor money. I've drained and farmed it and made it as pretty a farm as any one ever clapped eyes on."

"Dear me," she continued, without noticing what he said, "only thirty-five shillings an acre ! Why, it must be worth fifty shillings, such land as that."

"Fifty shillings," cried poor Clarke aghast. "Why, bless your soul miss, there'd be little or no profit at that price. It couldn't be done."

"I think it is worth fifty shillings an acre," she said calmly. "What does Mr.—— say ?"

"Why, miss, he only talks of raising it five shillings,—making it forty an acre."

"Ah ! I'm afraid he is too easy. Fifty shillings an acre, Mr. Clarke, I consider it worth; and shall so instruct him."

"Fifty shillings an acre !" cried the poor farmer, utterly dumbfounded. He could say no more, but broke into a profuse perspiration, between the heat and this astounding decision.

Maude Luton scarce knew whether to laugh at his absurd and undisguised dismay, or pity him ; but ultimately pity prevailed—partly from this cause, and partly perhaps wishing to let the odious Dolly know that *she* had some influence ; to let her know her power and superiority, in fact.

"Fifty shillings seems a great deal : do you not think that forty-five would meet the justice of the case ?"

"No, Maude, dear."

Dolly Clarke heard the heiress call her "dear" and gnashed her teeth.

"I do not ; I think fifty-five would be more nearly the true value."

Maude Luton could not help smiling at the expression of terror which so suddenly overspread the face of the unhappy farmer. His jaw dropped, his eyes opened wide, and gasping for breath, he used his pocket-handkerchief to wipe his damp face. Dolly Clarke saw that smile of triumph, she thought, and could no longer restrain her pent-up passion.

"I'm sure we want no favours from you, Miss Luton, nor the likes of you. It's no business of yours." Then, white with passion, she rose and said, addressing her father : "Come along, pa ; It's no use our stopping here—she's been before us."

"Dolly, what do you mean?" he gasped, "are you mad? do you know what you are talking about—who you are talking to?"

"Oh yes,—I know quite well. Come along."

"Mr. Clarke," said Maude de Vere quietly, "your daughter says she wishes no favours at the hands of my dear friend Miss Luton. It was a very rude speech; and as you brought her, of course I hold you responsible. It seems that your daughter has met my friend before."

"Yes," said Maude Luton quietly, and with provoking deliberation. "Miss Clarke was expelled from a boarding-school where I was,—that is all I know of her."

"Not before you, you jade—not before you ; you went first and you know it." She absolutely trembled with passion, and even shook her fist at her enemy.

"Mr. Clarke, I think you had better remove your

daughter," said Miss de Vere calmly; "She is offensive and insolent."

Almost by force the unhappy farmer dragged Dolly away, still fuming and burning with impotent rage. The moment she got outside the house, she burst into tears—tears not of sorrow but of spite.

"Ah! you may well cry—a nice mess you've made of it now. We shall be turned out o' house and home, I suppose; and all through you. Turned out of the old place, where I and my forefathers have farmed this hundred years; where my father and mother died, and theirs before them; turned adrift to look after another farm. But it's my own fault; it all comes of my folly; I a tenant-farmer, sending my daughter to a London boarding-school. I suppose you thought because the land was good, the crops good, and fortune was favourable,—because there was always plenty and a good home at the old Black Ash, that you were a gentleman's daughter. However, you are likely to find out your mistake now. It will be long before I get another such farm at such a price."

Dolly Clarke got no pity or consolation on any side: her father reproached her continually all the way home; and when her sisters learned from the angry farmer that owing to her temper they were likely to be turned away from Black Ash, they too joined in the cry, and yelped in chorus. Altogether the irascible and vindictive young lady, had only succeeded in getting into disgrace—had indeed "sowed the wind, and reaped the whirlwind."

In her own room she locked herself; and unable to rest or lie down, paced up and down, muttering to herself

ever and anon, "Ah, Miss Maude, you have got the best of me this time ; but if I'm not revenged, I will be revenged !"

As for Maude Luton, when she saw her old enemy leave, pale and trembling with passion, almost dragged away by her angry father, she smiled a smile of sweet revenge—for revenge is sweet, let moralists say what they like—and thought to herself : " So, Miss Dolly Clarke, you have already commenced to reap some of the fruits of your insolent and slanderous speech, when you dared to stigmatise me as ' Nobody's daughter.' "

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## CHAPTER XXII.

## MAUDE LUTON GROWS JEALOUS OF THE HEIRESS.

As for Miss De Vere, a wondrous change seemed to have come over her. When the termagant had left, she turned quietly to her friend and said, "What a passion that girl was in! She must hate you very much. Did you quarrel at school?"

"Quarrel! no. I don't condescend to quarrel with such people. She was insolent, and was expelled in consequence."

"Ah! She was insolent then, and was expelled from school. She has been insolent now; and though I know I have no absolute authority, being as it were but a child, I will take care she is expelled from Black Ash Farm.—How do you think I managed it, Maude dear?"

"I was astonished to hear you speak as you did," was the perfectly truthful reply. "I had no idea you could talk on business affairs at all."

Ah! People think I am simple and weak—and so I believe I am; but it is because I never take any trouble. But when I am roused, I feel that I can do anything."

Maude Luton felt immensely more respect for the young lady after this affair. When she was alone she thought over what had happened, and the part she had taken in it. She was naturally a good-hearted, forgiving girl; but she could never forget or forgive those scorching, searing, slan-

derous words in which Dolly Clarke stigmatised her as a nameless girl. Still, though she did not attempt to disguise the meetness of this complete humiliation of her traducer, she could not think of the poor farmer, her father, without sincere pity. It was not his fault that his daughter was a wicked vixen. He would probably be turned away from his farm, which his father had cultivated before him, and perhaps ruined, if Miss De Vere still persisted in her design; and she felt that the young lady would so persist if no other influence were brought to bear. Maude felt that it rested with her. She doubted not for a moment that she could influence her new friend as she chose. Mr. Clarke's sorrowful, dismal face haunted her—his look of despair as he went out with his daughter continually reproached her. She was not a cruel girl; so she determined to talk to Miss De Vere on the subject. As usual, she carried her intention into effect the instant she had decided.

"Don't you think," she said, "we have been rather too hard on poor Mr. Clarke?"

"Too hard? His daughter grossly insulted you, you say?"

"Yes; but he has never offended me."

"Why did he bring that red-haired vixen here then to insult you even in my presence? She shall suffer for it."

"But stay, Maude dear; I have something to propose which will be a most bitter punishment to her without injuring him. I could not bear the thought of turning a man from his home and the home of his ancestors. I should never forgive myself."

"Well, what is your plan?"

"Simply this; to write and demand from her father a written apology from this girl to you and me, separately. That will be gall and wormwood to her. She will be forced to do it, as I believe they have only the farm and perhaps some small sum saved to depend upon; but she will almost wish her right hand had been cut off after she has penned and signed it. I know the girl's nature. She is insolent, overbearing, and in her low way proud. It will be to her a perpetual punishment." She carried her point without difficulty; and at once a letter was concocted and sent to Mr. Clarke. This was how it ran:—

"SIR,—The gross and un-ladylike conduct of the young person you brought with you to-day, and who I understand is your daughter, compel me thus to address you. I feel myself called upon to demand a written and humble apology to myself, and also another addressed to Miss Luton, my guest and friend, whom she so grossly insulted. If both apologies are not received within twelve hours, I will give instructions as to your vacation of the farm you hold, at the earliest possible moment. I enclose a form of apology,—the only one which will be accepted by me and my friend, on whose behalf I speak.—I remain, sir, your obedient servant,

MAUDE DE VERE.

"Mr. Clarke, Black-Ash Farm."

This letter she despatched early on the following morning. Neither doubted that an answer would be received in the course of the day. Nor were they mistaken; for the expected apologies came, duly subscribed "Dorothea Clarke."

Maude Luton's triumph over her mischievous enemy was

complete. The next foe she would have to do battle with and conquer was herself.

A week passed on ; but at the urgent request of her hostess, she prolonged her visit for a few days longer. By this time they were on the most intimate and loving terms. The young heiress seemed to have given herself up body and soul to her new friend—to have entirely surrendered her own will in her favour. Had Maude Luton schemed ever so skilfully and persistently to bring this state of affairs about, it is certain she could not have been more completely successful. She now remembered with something of the same mysterious awe with which she heard Davenport's first prophesy, his words respecting the young heiress, to the effect, that any person gifted with a stronger mind than herself could, with opportunity and a little time, obtain complete control and mastery over her. Maude Luton could not help liking the girl. Her affection was so genuine, and she had so many good qualities, that to avoid doing so were impossible. Since the memorable scene with Dolly Clarke, a reaction seemed to have taken place in the mind and character of Maude de Vere ; she became more weak and yielding than ever. It seemed as though the strong effort of will she displayed on that occasion had quite exhausted all her mental energy. The increased respect Maude Luton felt for her for a time, faded away as she discovered that the girl had relapsed again into the same childish innocent way, never troubling herself about anything or taking interest except when directed by her friends.

"Such a girl never should possess these estates," thought Miss Luton. "She is good and gentle ; but no more fitted for her honoured station than she is to be autocrat of Russia.

She shall not possess them—they are lawfully mine ; and to possess myself of my rights would but be doing her a kindness. I believe she would rejoice to be freed from the care and trouble."

Ever since the day when she first noticed the old cabinet in the little boudoir, it had seldom been for long, out of her thoughts. Again and again she had been alone with it, but had contented herself with wistful looks. Once or twice she had been sorely tempted at least to open it and look in ; but she resisted, aware that if she went so far she would not probably stop there. At last she resolved to settle the matter abruptly one way or the other ; so she said one afternoon, as they were sitting together in the little room.

"Do you know that for the last few minutes I have been thinking about that old cabinet ?"

"Indeed ! Yes, I understand,—you think it spoils the look of the room. So do I ; but it cannot well be helped,—I should not like to have it moved now."

"No ; that is not exactly of what I was thinking. I was wondering and puzzling as to the contents—I should so like to examine it."

"Pray do so," was the ready reply ; but don't ask me to join you,—I have a horror of it. I am sure you will find no treasures there."

"Oh, I don't suppose I shall," she replied, forcing a laugh. "Still some day or other I mean to have a peep at the mysterious interior."

"If you call a lot of bundles of papers, letters, parchments, and accounts, mysterious, you can ; but I can see nothing at all romantic or interesting."

Maude Luton took an early opportunity, when Miss de Vere was absent for a short time, of using the permission so freely given her. She found no difficulty in opening the cabinet, and having done so, she proceeded to inspect the contents. Drawer after drawer she drew out, and found them all to contain bundles of papers—old, dusty and dirty. All, however, were of the most uninteresting kind,—farm-bailiffs' accounts, household accounts, and lawyers' letters; none having any bearing whatever on the subject she thought of. Presently she came to a drawer full of private letters. Her pulse quickened, and she proceeded to examine these with nervous eagerness. Alas, disappointment again met her! The letters were addressed to Stanton de Vere, but bore date years before he could have seen her mother; nor was there anything whatever interesting in their contents. They were from London friends apparently, and addressed to Stanton de Vere, at the Hall. In the brief glance she took at these letters she saw enough to convince her that they came from fast, dissolute men-about-town, and were written to him as being one of their own set. At last, however, she came across a letter lying by itself, not done up in any bundle. A glance at the address, partly torn and defaced, made her heart beat faster. *Kilmarnock!*—yes, there was the all-important word on the back. With trembling hands she commenced reading it. Alas, the contents were much the same as those of the others. It was, she thought at first, addressed to Stanton de Vere by some of the same friends who had indited all the other letters. But after reading it through she turned again to the cover and saw that it was addressed to "Captain Grey, Kilmarnock."

The rest of the address—the name of the hotel and street—was torn off. With feelings of bitter disappointment she threw it down, and closed the cabinet, as there was nothing more to examine. Already she had been standing before it for more than an hour. But on second thoughts she regained possession of the letter in question, and folding it up placed it in her purse. The next morning she heard that Sydney Davenport would return that night. Now she did not wish to meet him while a guest at the Hall. Probably she feared his keen penetration, and felt a little ashamed at the part she was playing.

“Do you know,—I am so sorry,” she said; “but I have had a letter from home. David wishes me to return. They expect company and want my assistance.”

“Oh, I am so sorry; must you go so soon? I thought you would have stayed another week at least. I shall be so dull when you have gone.”

“I should much have liked to stay longer, dear,” she replied; “But indeed I cannot.”

“Must you go to-night?”

“I should like too—if it would be convenient to send me over. Still—”

“Oh, don’t talk like that; convenient indeed!—as if the whole place were not as good as your own, to do as you like with. But you will come back and visit me again, will you not?”

“Oh yes, certainly; and that very soon. Then we can talk over our continental plans, and lots of other things.”

“You must come and see me very often. I do wish you would let me send one of the carriages for you every day; you know, if you didn’t want it, you could send it back.”

"You may if you like," Maude Luton replied.

"May I really? that is kind of you; you can't think how glad I am." She expressed her gratitude at being allowed to send a carriage over in the most childish and extravagant manner.

Maude Luton was not sorry to leave; while she was a guest at the Hall, conflicting emotions so influenced her, that she scarcely knew her own mind. There was much that was loveable about Maude de Vere, apart from the fact of her affection for herself, Maude Luton. At times she felt quite a pang of remorse at the thought that, should she succeed in the one object of her life, she would in a worldly sense, ruin this young trusting girl. It was in vain that she consoled herself with the thought that the present heiress of Holford Hall would be happier without the possessions which she did not care about, which were rather a burden to her, in fact, than a pleasure. She almost regretted she had accepted the invitation, and wished that at any rate they had not become so friendly. As she was driven out at the park-gates, and had seen Miss de Vere wave her last farewell, a feeling of relief came over her; she felt as though she were more free to move and act. Doubtless Sydney Davenport had brought with him some information. Had he failed utterly, he would have written to her and said so before returning. She was full of hope, even confidence, of the good news she would hear from him. Her hopes were fated to be rudely dashed.

At the time she was driven over, Sydney Davenport had arrived about half an hour. David, and Tom Hopton were out, and he alone received her. He greeted her kindly



but gravely, and she soon saw by his manner that she could hope for no good news as regarded the object she had in view.

"And you have been well, I hope?" she asked. "I am very glad to see you."

"Yes, I have been well, but I am much disappointed."

"Ah, then you have failed!" As she spoke she sank into a chair and leaned back despairingly.

"Yes, I have failed utterly and completely. I will tell you plainly my impression. It is this; that no marriage ever took place at or near Kilmarnock between Stanton de Vere and any one else whatever; more than that, I do not think Stanton de Vere ever could have been there, at least for any time."

"And this is the result of my first attempt to vindicate my mother's memory and my own rights—utter failure!"

"You have said it—utter failure!"

Maude was for a time quite prostrated and dispirited.

"And what do you advise me to do now?"

"Do you wish my candid advice, my real opinion?"

"I do."

"Then I advise you to give up this pursuit as hopeless, to relinquish all thought of proving yourself the eldest daughter of Stanton de Vere—born in wedlock."

"And so you advise me, knowing what I know, feeling assured as I do that I am wrongfully exposed to ignominy and disgrace, wrongfully deprived of what should be my own,—knowing all this, I say, you advise me to remain quietly to be trampled on! You do not know me!" She rose as she spoke, and stood before him like an angry goddess, as grand, as beautiful. "You do not know me, Mr.

Davenport," she repeated, her voice trembling with emotion. "I will never relinquish the pursuit of this, my life's object. I am by right the heiress of Holford Hall, and my name is Maude De Vere. I will be acknowledged as Maude de Vere, and possess the Hall and estates!"

Sydney Davenport regarded her with admiration and wonder. Now that she stood up before him—her head thrown back, her figure drawn up to its full height—she seemed to him more magnificent in her beauty than he had ever seen her before. She had taken off her hat, and the light black-lace shawl had fallen from her shoulders, revealing the exquisite outline of her shape,—soft, undulating, and graceful. The close-fitting black-silk dress became her admirably; and as she almost panted with excitement, he saw the quick rise and fall of her bosom, and fancied he could detect the wild beating of her heart.

"Pray do not excite yourself, Miss Luton," he said. "You asked me for my advice, and I gave it to you. That is all. You are not obliged to take it you know."

"I am surprised at your giving me such advice. Had you known me better, you would never have done so."

And so saying Maude sank slowly into an easy chair, gathered the shawl about her, and casting her eyes on the ground gave way apparently to melancholy thought. Again Davenport examined her closely, and thought she looked as beautiful thus reclining, sad and pensive, as she did a moment or two back, when she stood with flushed cheek, flashing eyes, and heaving breast, passionately avering her determination to persist in her design. Although, as a man of the world, he had now formed an opinion that what she strove after was unattainable—a chimera, in fact, a

wild ambitious dream of this fiery untamed spirit—still he could not help admiring and respecting her firm determination in spite of failure and defeat. "She will persevere," he thought, "she is that sort of girl; and may perhaps waste the best and brightest part of her life. Heaven grant that disappointment, the non-fulfilment of hopes, and the supposed sense of deep wrong lying on her mind, may not influence her for evil!"

"Well, Miss Luton, if you have so determined, I shall be happy to aid you in any way which lies in my power. I hope you believe that."

She started to her feet, and came over to him, her eyes brimming with tears. "Pardon me," she said, taking his hand in hers and pressing it warmly; "I spoke unkindly just now. I did not mean it; and am sure I am very, very grateful to you for all the trouble you have taken for me."

"Pray don't mention it," Sydney faltered. "I assure you it was a pleasure." Somehow or other he had lost his usual coolness and self-possession. The touch of that small hand sent a thrill through his veins, and those melting deep eyes gazing into his, also had their share in his confusion. The fact was that Sydney Davenport was in love with this strange beautiful girl.

They had a long talk; at first of his unsuccessful efforts to get the information she required, and then of other things. She told him of her visit to Holford Hall, and of her new friendship with Miss de Verè.

"Ah, poor girl! I am indeed sorry for her," Sydney said.

"Sorry! why?"

"She is friendless and alone ; friendless, I mean, in the sense of having no one older than herself to whom she has been accustomed to look up, to guide and direct her."

"Do you think she is beautiful?" Maude asked, looking him stealthily in the face.

"I do,—very beautiful," he replied frankly.

"And loveable?"

"Yes, she is my ideal of a gentle yielding girl, who will ripen into a loving woman ; docile, obedient,—where obedience is due,—as a woman should be."

"So," said Maude scornfully, "you are of opinion that woman's sole duty is to obey—be a humble slave!"

"No," he replied quietly, "I do not think a woman should be a slave, or tyrannised over in any way ; but I do think that a woman, as the weaker, the one endowed with the more gentle attributes, should yield gracefully to the stronger will of man." •

"Right or wrong?"

"No good man would ever wish to coerce his wife to do that which was wrong, or prevent her from doing that which was right or harmless."

"And the judgment, the decision, should be left in all cases with the man, the superior being, the higher intelligence?"

"Yes, I do think so ; man's judgment is usually more correct than that of woman, as his will is stronger, his reasoning more sound. Women are the creatures of impulse,—act almost universally on their feelings, not their judgment. Hence it is, they are unfitted for business, or arduous and difficult undertakings."

"Your opinions of our sex, Mr. Davenport, are slightly contemptuous," said Maude, in an annoyed tone.

"By no means ; I am an admirer of all women, a worshipper of beautiful women. But as I should hate to see a splendid statue disfigured with gaudy paint, so should I regret to see a woman disfigure herself—unsex herself almost—by arrogating man's attributes."

"I fear your wife will be a very insignificant personage in your household, Mr. Davenport."

"My wife!—ah, I don't suppose I shall ever have one. I shall never marry unless I see some one whom I can love, and—"

"Until you find a meek angel coming up to your ideas, in fact," she interrupted.

"By no means. Strange to say that would not be my ideal. Like Petruchio I should like to tame a shrew for myself—to win back an erring nature."

"And where, Signor Shrew-tamer, do you expect to find a Katharine?"

"Ah, that I cannot say," he replied with a smile. "I leave that to fate."

His words were light and careless apparently, but Maude, looking earnestly at him, thought they bore a hidden meaning. Already, it will be observed, she was so deeply interested in him, as to connect herself with him in her thoughts on every possible occasion, and to fancy that every allusion by him which could refer to her was so intended.

Maude had casually expressed a wish that Davenport had never gone to the Clarkes at Black-Ash farm. She did not expect for a moment that now he had made his arrangements he would alter them for her. She learned

from Tom Hopton that it was the very best time of the year for trout-fishing, and expected he would be off trouting on the following day. However, she was mistaken. Happening to mention the subject, she asked him when he was going over.

"I shall not go there again," he said. "I think the girl behaved so coarsely and rudely to you, that I should feel disgusted and annoyed at being compelled to meet her. No ; I mean to make myself happy here for a time with you, Tom Hopton, and David."

Maude did not express her pleasure in words, but her looks, her sparkling eyes, and bright smile, told the tale, how highly she was gratified at the compliment paid her. Nothing that he could have done could possibly have placed him higher in her favour than this course of his. She thought it so generous and noble of him to forego his own pleasure out of regard for her.

The days passed on pleasantly enough ; not, however, without some little clouds to mar the bright sky. Maude went over two, three, and four times a-week sometimes to Holford Hall. On some of these occasions Sydney Davenport volunteered to accompany her, and strange to say, though she liked him so well, she hated the idea of his going there with her. But she knew not how to refuse his offer with any grace ; so with her he went.

Then her annoyance and heart-burnings began. Davenport paid more attention to Miss de Vere than he did to her handsome self. It was not so much what he said as his manner—so obviously that of an admirer—which galled Maude Luton. He never contradicted Miss de Vere, or spoke plainly and sharply to her, as he sometimes did to

Miss Luton. On the other hand he reasoned with her respectfully, deferentially, on any disputed point ; and it increased the anger and discontent of the surgeon's niece when she observed that his words usually prevailed. Maude de Vere did not attempt to disguise her liking for him. She hung on his arm, looked smilingly in his face, and gave a hundred other proofs of her partiality. She asked his advice on every subject, and readily promised to take it. Davenport smilingly gave it, and seemed pleased by her expressions of gratitude.

"When are you coming over again, Mr. Davenport?" the heiress asked, as they were taking leave one fine evening.

"I cannot say exactly,—some day in the course of the week?"

"You promise it shall not be longer than a week?"

"Oh yes, I will promise that."

"Good-bye, Mr. Davenport, for the present ; and remember your promise."

"Good-bye, Miss De Vere ; and remember what I told you about your fits of low spirits."

"Oh yes,—always to set to work and do something, if it is only to weed the garden ; but I have a better plan than that."

"What is it?"

"Why, I will think of you ; and that will drive all black thoughts away, I am sure."

Davenport laughed, but Maude Luton turned red with anger, and then looked as black as thunder. Neither of them noticed it, however ; but during the drive home she was silent and morose, and would scarcely answer her

companion at all. He, ignorant of having given her cause of offence, wondered what strange temper had come over her. He dreamed not that she was jealous—jealous of him.

Perhaps, had he been placed in similar circumstances, had he seen another man paying her devoted attentions, apparently acceptable to herself, he too might have felt as she felt. As it was, he thought this gloomy fit which had come over her but another phase in her character.

Maude Luton was now busying herself, preparing for her journey to the Continent. She had quite made up her mind, she told her cousin, to spend at least two years abroad. Maude De Vere was to accompany her,—that had long been settled,—not, apparently from any wish on the part of Miss Luton, but at the earnest entreaty of the heiress. She clung with desperate tenacity and fidelity to this her first, her only female friend.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

## IN THE LAWYER'S OFFICE.

FIVE months had elapsed since the untimely death of Dr. Luton, and now the two girls were ready to start for Paris together. It had been arranged that they were to be accompanied as far as Dover by Miss De Vere's maid. Thence they were to go on alone to Paris, near which gay capital was situated the establishment of Madame Dumonney. Nominally it was a boarding-school; but in reality it was an elegant boarding-house for young ladies of wealth, English and French. Before leaving London, however, Miss De Vere was to call upon her guardian Mr. Cardale, of South Square, Gray's Inn.

Two days before the day appointed for their departure, Sydney Davenport strolled into the little drawing-room, wherein was Maude Luton. The more he saw of this strange girl—so beautiful, so steadfast in purpose, and withal so incomprehensible—the more he felt fascinated by, and attracted to her. For weeks he had puzzled his brain by vainly endeavouring to discover what purpose she had hidden in her breast. He felt sure that she had a purpose—a steadfast, earnest purpose and design,—all bearing on what he knew was the object of her life, the discovery of her mother's marriage.

At times he felt inclined to believe that she intended to

make use of Maude de Vere; but on consideration he did not see how that could be possible. The heiress herself knew nothing of her father's life or pursuits: that Maude had told him some time ago. It was only a vague suspicion; but it would seem again and again that, somehow or other, Maude de Vere would be made subservient to Maude Luton's purpose. But how?—how? That was a question he could not answer.

Observing that Maude Luton had sunk into one of her habitual reveries, and was gazing vacantly at space, he had an opportunity of steadily regarding her. She was leaning back in a low easy-chair; her tall graceful figure lying supple and pliant; her head slightly turned towards her left shoulder, and so away from him. Her face presented to him a semi-profile—perhaps its most beautiful aspect—while her large eyes remained half-open in dreamy languor. One hand lay over the arm of the chair, the other in her lap. The left foot crossed over the right, beat time to some imaginary air, of which she was not at the time conscious. Her breathing was slow and regular, as though she slept; and he watched for some minutes the slow upheaving and falling of her bosom.

"Beautiful, lovely as summer night," murmured Sydney Davenport; "I would give something to know of what she is thinking."

Of what indeed? Of wealth and grandeur—of triumph and success—of difficulties and enemies vanquished, friends taken to her heart—of her future life, when she should be a wealthy lady, and should have asserted her rights. Such was Maude Luton's day-dream.

He determined to awake her from her abstraction. "Maude!" he cried sharply.

She started violently, and, with a half-uttered cry, sprang to her feet—the sudden motion causing her hair to escape from its fastenings and fall in wild profusion over her neck and shoulders. Her sudden awakening startled even him, its cause. She stood before him as though galvanised into life by his command—breathing, throbbing, panting; the hot blood rushing to her cheek. A beautiful statue, a reclining Venus she had been a moment ago,—now she was a bright human being instinct with life. Davenport felt somewhat embarrassed for a moment.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I did not intend to alarm you." She recovered herself, and laughed.

"It is very foolish of me, I know," she said; "but you shouldn't take advantage of my folly and frighten me so. I declare your voice seemed like a sudden summons from another world. My thoughts were far away in dreamland. I was not even conscious of your presence. You must have entered very quietly. All at once I heard, as I thought, a loud and awful voice shout forth my name, 'Maude.' It seemed to echo and reverberate through all space. For a moment I could not see. I believe the motion by which I started up was instinctive. However, here I am; and thank you for awaking me, albeit it was somewhat sudden."

"I am very sorry," he said, "I did not intend to frighten you, though I must own I spoke rather loudly. I came to ask you if you were going over to Holford Hall to-morrow."

Instantly there came a change, a sudden coldness over the girl's manner. She reseated herself, and looking him quietly in the face, said, "No I did not think of going. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am going over."

She leaned back in her chair, and regarded him through her half-closed eyes in a manner which was extremely annoying to him."

"Does that surprise or displease you?" he asked.

"Displease me!—surprise me! Why should it?"

"Why then, let me ask you, do you look so curiously at me?"

"I was thinking that Holford Hall seems to have great attractions for you," she said quietly.

"Yes," he replied with provoking coolness. "I like the place, and I like Maude De Vere immensely."

Words lightly, carelessly spoken, but of deep import to Maude Luton,—words which caused the blood to leave her face, her hands to clench involuntarily, her eyes to gleam threateningly,—words which caused a pang of jealousy and anger; for were they not almost a confession that he loved Maude De Vere?

Pale to her lips, she sat silent for some time and brooded. All at once a determination arose in her breast! She knew she had power over him; she would put it to the test—match *her* influence against that of the heiress. She no longer disguised from herself now, that she cared for this man with more than a passing interest. Next to the one object of her life, she thought of and cared more for him than all the world beside. She knew it was utterly useless attempting to deceive

herself. All that she could do was to prevent his knowing it, at least prematurely. So, acting at once on her resolution, she leaned forward and lightly rested her hand on his arm: "Mr. Davenport, I am going to ask you something."

"Very well."

"It is a favour."

"I can almost promise you it is granted before you ask."

"Do not go to Holford Hall to-morrow. Come with me into the town,—I want to make some purchases."

"My dear Maude," he said (they were on very familiar terms now, and at her request he called her Maude always), "I will accompany you willingly into the town; but—at what time do you wish to go?"

"In the morning," she said sharply.

"Very well, then; I can go over to Holford Hall in the evening."

"Ah! I asked you not to go to Holford Hall to-morrow?"

He stared at her in surprise. "Not go! What possible objection can you have?" he exclaimed. "I must go,—I have promised."

"Promised?"

"Yes; promised to teach Miss De Vere the moves on the chess-board."

"You can make an excuse; you will be tired after your return with me."

"I may be tired, but I shall not be too tired to redeem my pledged word."

"Then you really mean to go?"

"Have I not promised?" he replied.

"I have never asked you a favour before."

"I regret that the first should be a request for me to break my word," he said.

"Very well, sir, as you please," she said coldly; "of course you are your own master." She rose and moved slowly and gracefully out of the room. He listened till the last rustle of her dress had faded away; then said half aloud—

"What on earth's in the wind now? How can I have offended her? What means her sudden dislike to my going to Holford Hall?" He asked himself these questions, but was quite unable to find answers thereto.

With all a man's obtuseness in matters relating to the curious, tortuous, impulsive, unreasoning mind of woman, he never dreamed that she was *jealous*. He liked her very much. No, he did not like her—that cold word does not express his feeling—he was fascinated, intoxicated by her beauty, her wit, her talent. She was seldom out of his thoughts. On the other hand, he had never bestowed a thought on Maude de Vere otherwise than as a half-educated, neglected girl, to be deeply pitied, not envied, on account of being heiress to Holford Hall. No suspicion of Maude Luton being jealous for a moment illumined the doubt and uncertainty in which he was as to the cause of her extraordinary request, and anger at its being refused. Perhaps had she been of a gay or flighty disposition; had she given encouragement to any of the many young men who now sought her cousin's acquaintance obviously to get introduction and speech to her, he too might have felt *jealous*. But she was remarkably open and single-minded.

She laughed at them to him openly; and often when any of these would-be admirers called, she would make her escape the back way, and call him either by sending the servant or by throwing pebbles at the smoking-room window, when he was there. Then they would stroll off together for a walk, and not return perhaps for hours, to the great discomfiture of the gentleman who had called especially in hopes of seeing David's beautiful cousin. Of course this was very flattering to Sydney, and he certainly did not fail to appreciate it. It riveted firmer the silken fetters by which he was being fast bound to Maude Luton.

Now, however, there had risen a sudden storm. What could he do? Yield? Out of the question. His word was plighted; and had it not been so, it is doubtful if he would have given way. "She will think better of it, no doubt," he said to himself, as the final result of his cogitations. "At all events I mean to go to Holford Hall to-morrow. So that is settled." And when Mr. Sydney Davenport said a thing, it invariably was settled.

Maude was very cool and distant to him at supper-time, but shook hands with him as usual and bade him good-night on retiring to rest. She looked in his face for just one fleeting moment. An inquiring glance it was, as though to read in his features whether he meant to go or not.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A NEW HOME.

ON the following morning after breakfast Davenport said politely to Maude. "Miss Luton, you were speaking of going into the town? I shall be happy to escort you, if you will allow me."

"Thank you," she said. "I do not think I shall go till the afternoon."

He had hoped she would have forgotten her last night's temper, and wouldn't name her senseless objection to his going to Holford Hall; but in this he was mistaken. She wished to know whether he would go in spite of her, fondly hoping that he would yield, and in deference to her wishes give up the idea. Alas! she knew not Sydney Davenport. He smiled good-humouredly when she said she should not go till the afternoon, and strolled carelessly away. Half an hour afterwards, however, she saw him ride off on horseback alone. He took the direction of Holford Hall; but of course she could not be certain that he had gone thither. Her cousin David was able to inform her, however; for dis- she asked him, he said at once that Davenport had gone over to the Hall, having promised Miss De Vere to teach her chess. Evidently he made no secret of his contempt and disregard for her wishes. That evening she met Davenport at the supper-table, as usual.



She had determined to school her face, and not give him the flattering satisfaction of knowing she was annoyed; but though she did her utmost, smiled and talked, yet she was not quite successful, and could not resist just one allusion :

"I hope you had an apt pupil, Mr. Davenport, in Miss De Vere. Chess is a delightful game, but it must be very tedious to teach it."

"Well I cannot say I was very fortunate in my pupil. Miss De Vere has an excellent memory, but she seems to lack the power of concentrating her attention on one object."

"Ah! perhaps her thoughts were otherwise occupied?"

"Very possibly," he said carelessly; "at all events they did not appear to be on the chess-board. I have promised to teach her the game; and she on her part has promised more attention for the future."

"I hope both of you may keep your words," said Maude Luton, scarcely able to disguise her annoyance. His careless indifferent manner galled her deeply. Shortly afterwards she bade him good-night, but obviously not with the usual cordiality. He was in an excellent temper however, and seemed not in the least disturbed thereby. Slowly this first coolness increased between these two young people, between two such fast friends, on the eve of becoming declared lovers. Davenport saw with regret her pride and unforgivingness of disposition; but his admiration for her did not decrease one whit. In good truth, he did her some injustice. It was not pride *and* unforgivingness, but the former only; for she would have been only too glad, on

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the faintest word from him, to have been on the old terms. But he would not say that word,—would not yield one whit, nor give even the most distant and qualified explanation or apology.

The day came on which the two Maudes,—the rich heiress and the poor surgeon's niece,—were to set out together for London *en route* for Paris. Davenport thought of accompanying them at least as far as London; and to Maude's great delight had expressed his intention some days before. But since this unfortunate quarrel she understood, from an occasional word let drop, that such was no longer his intention. Day after day passed, and Maude Luton began to blame herself, and hope that accident would give rise to an explanation, or that he would let drop some word which she could twist into a regret for his conduct, and so at the same time soothe her pride, and ease her mind by a reconciliation. But he was as proud as herself, and no such occasion arose.

The morning came on which she was to leave Cumberland for, at any rate, six months—probably for a year; and shortly before eleven Miss De Vere arrived in the carriage—another following with her luggage. The meeting between her and Sydney Davenport was cordial and friendly; but even Maude Luton's jealous eye could detect nothing which spoke of anything beyond friendship. She now began to think that she had been hasty, and repented her imperiousness, which had only had the effect of estranging perhaps the only true friend she had in the world besides her cousin. Maude de Vere bade adieu to David Luton kindly; to Sydney Davenport with great warmth, making him promise to write and

answer her letters. "You must write to both of us, Mr. Davenport, by turns, you know; so that there may be no jealousy. Will you promise?"

"Oh, yes; anything you please," he said, laughing.

Assuredly this speech of hers was not one that a girl in love with a man would have made; and so it struck Maude Luton. It was now her turn to bid farewell to Sydney Davenport; she had already done so to her cousin David, who had been suddenly called to the surgery. He was standing by the door of the carriage, in which Miss De Vere had already taken her seat. Talking and laughing to the heiress, he did not hear her until she was quite close; then turning at the rustle of her dress, he grew suddenly grave, and stood on one side. She looked in his face, and their eyes met—his beaming with truth, frankness, and good-nature, but withal a little sorrowful in their expression. Maude's lips trembled as she said, "Good-bye, Mr. Davenport!"

He took her offered hand frankly, and said with cordiality, "Good-bye, Miss Luton; I hope you may be happy!"

For a moment he held her hand in his; but though her heart fluttered strangely, she would not give way. The least sign, the slightest pressure in the world, a smile even on her fair face would have sufficed to have told him that the little difference between them was ended. But she did nothing, merely repeating, "Thank you, Mr. Davenport. I am much obliged for all your kindness. Good-bye!"

He released her hand, and with a sinking heart she entered the carriage, still with a faint hope that he

would propose to accompany them at least to the railway station. He would have done so had she given him the least encouragement; as it was, he said to the coachman, "All right;" and taking off his hat to the ladies, the carriage drove off. Maude leaned back, and from each of her eyes there ran a tear, which all her pride and self-command could not prevent from welling up.

"And is it thus we part?" she said bitterly. After having been such close friends; after all he had done for her—the trouble he had taken on her behalf—she had left him on bad terms! Now that it was too late, she saw her ingratitude and folly. She remembered his uniform good nature and good temper. How ready he always was to oblige! Then his journey to Scotland on her behalf, at great inconvenience and expense to himself! She called to mind now all the nobler traits of his character,—his unselfishness, absence of pride, truthfulness, and stainless honour. She bethought herself in what glowing terms her cousin David spoke of him; indeed no one who knew him had any but good words to speak for him. Lastly, there was the girl beside her, who seemed to rise in evidence against her folly. No one with the least perception could imagine for a moment that there was any tender feeling between her and Davenport. Their farewell had been far too cordial and unembarrassed, and the heiress was in too high spirits afterwards, to allow of such a supposition for a moment, considering that she might not see him again for years,—certainly would not for months. Maude Luton was now thoroughly aware of her folly; and to add to her misery, there arose the thought,

"How he must despise me! How mean and suspicious he must think me! Doubtless he has divined my secret, and knows the truth,—that I was jealous of this girl by my side."

This latter thought was bitterest of all,—that he should know the cause of her requesting him not to go to Holford Hall; and knowing it, should still go, hold his ground, and defy her fascinations—perhaps laughing at her weakness. This almost gave rise again to the old angry feeling; but, however, it soon merged into sorrow and self-reproach; and long ere the train reached London, Maude Luton had thoroughly repented, and resolved to put things right at the earliest possible moment.

Arrived at Paddington, they left their luggage at the Great Western Hotel, where they were to stay that night; and taking a cab, drove direct to the office of Mr. Cardale, the old solicitor, who was Maude de Vere's surviving guardian. On giving her card to the clerk, the old gentleman at once came out of his office to greet his fair ward. When he saw the young ladies standing before him, he stared from one to the other in blank astonishment.

"Bless my soul!" he faltered, "Miss de Vere,—two Miss de Veres!" and he rubbed his eyes, as though doubting their evidence. It was the great likeness between the two girls which so confused him.

"No,—not two," said the heiress, advancing towards him. "I am Miss De Vere; this is my friend Miss Luton."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the old lawyer again,

carefully wiping his spectacles, and placing them on his nose, and again regarding the two young ladies. "Wonderful, wonderful! To save my life, I could not tell one of you from the other. Walk in, ladies—walk in."

Mr. Cardale's words produced a singular effect on Maude Luton. Something seemed suddenly to dart across her mind; her cheek flushed, and with an impatient gesture she followed her friend into the snug private room. The business between guardian and ward was soon completed. It consisted principally of money arrangements; and he was explaining to her how she was to procure any sum she required through an English banker in Paris, whom he named. There was, however, a brief paper which he wished her to sign; and as a witness was necessary, he asked Miss Luton, who had gone off into one of her fits of abstraction, to oblige.

Awaking with a start, she consented, as a matter of course; and when the heiress had written her name, "Maude de Vere," at the foot, she took the pen. Keeping her eye fixed on the signature above, she slowly wrote "Maude de Vere." The lawyer took the paper, and as he read it, again an exclamation of astonishment broke from him. He had been looking another way when Maude Luton's turn came to sign, and he did not see her write, although he had pointed out the spot with his finger.

"Bless my soul!" he said; "why Miss De Vere, you have signed your name twice!"

"No,—only once," was the reply.

"But here it is,—Maude de Vere signed twice!"

"Oh, how stupid of me!" cried Miss Luton, colouring up to the temples. "I really was not thinking what I was

doing, and by mistake signed Maude de Vere. I suppose it was looking at the other signature which caused me to do so, in absence of mine."

"But both these signatures are in the same hand-writing," urged the lawyer, utterly bewildered.

"No,—I assure you I wrote the second signature; and very foolish it was of me too."

"Wonderful, wonderful! This is a day of surprises—two young ladies singularly alike. I know I shall never be able to tell one from the other; and then, to cap all, their handwriting is the same. Wonderful,—I repeat it, —wonderful!"

Maude Luton's mistake rendered the preparation of another document necessary. This delayed them some time, which Maude Luton occupied in looking around the office and reading all the names on the tin boxes containing the deeds and papers of Mr. Cardale's different clients. Her eye rested frequently on two in particular,—one labelled "Stanton de Vere, Esq.," the other "Holford Lees estates."

The contents of both these boxes really concerned her, and she felt a burning curiosity to know more of them than the outside. But at present this was of course out of the question, so she took leave of Mr. Cardale, when her friend had finished her business and been supplied with a roll of notes as ready-money. Maude Luton had found in that brief visit ample food for reflection to last her all day; and though their occupation was that so dear to the hearts of most young ladies—shopping—she was absent, indifferent, distraught. So much so, that at last she grew so cold and silent that Miss De Vere thought her friend must be

unwell, and returned to the hotel a couple of hours earlier than had been originally intended.

The next day they went by train to Dover; thence by boat to Calais, and on by rail to the capital of France, where they safely arrived, and put up for the night at the Hotel de Louvre. Maude Luton assumed the management of everything. Though she had never travelled before, she was as cool and collected as a veteran tourist. Nothing frightened or discomposed her; and a dozen times on the journey, Miss De Vere congratulated herself on having secured such a friend.

The building in which was the *pension* of Madame Dumonney was situated some six or seven miles from Paris. It was a large old-fashioned brick mansion, entirely surrounded by high walls, enclosing a small park and charming grounds. These walls, be it observed, were not intended to keep those within from getting out (for madame received only young ladies who had arrived at an age capable of taking care of themselves), but to prevent those on the outside from staring in and intruding on the privacy of the inmates. Madame Dumonney received her new pupils, or rather boarders, very graciously—speaking English excellently, and with but a very slight accent. She welcomed them to the Chateau d'Armand—so called after the ancient family who owned it—with well-bred politeness, but a total absence of cordiality.

"If it is convenient, mademoiselles, I will show you over the place and to your sleeping apartment. In this establishment we always give our young ladies the privilege of sleeping alone, or two together, if friends."

"Oh, yes," cried Miss De Vere, clinging to her



friend; "we will sleep in the same room—will we not, dear?"

"Yes, certainly, if you please."

"*Bien*," said madame, who from the first had been regarding the two girls with a curiosity unusual to her; "Madoiselles are friends—probably relations, cousins—although I was not informed so in the letters I received."

"No," replied Maude Luton calmly; "we are only friends,—no relations whatever."

"Indeed?" replied madame, lifting her eyebrows in well-bred surprise. The likeness is marvellous."

"It has been before remarked," replied our heroine calmly.

Having seen their bedrooms, they were shown over the chateau to the dining-room, drawing-room, music-room, and those devoted to tuition; also the chapel, which was richly decorated with all the pomp and show in which Roman Catholicism delights. Both were struck with the beauty of the decorations; especially by the stained-glass windows. "These were presented to the chapel," madame informed them, "by a rich English lady—formerly a pupil here, and who had subsequently joined in the true Church." Several times they passed priests and nuns in the passages; so from these evidences, and the manner of the proprietress, it was plain to Maude Luton that proselytism was carried on to a considerable extent.

There were, they were informed on inquiry, seventy young ladies in the establishment; forty of whom were French, ten were Germans, six Italians, and the remaining fourteen English—their arrival making the number of sixteen. Of these English girls, five were Roman Catholics.

They had no reason to find fault with the furniture or belongings of the chateau. Everything was of the best, and in excellent taste. Nowhere was there any appearance of parsimony. Dinner, they were informed, was served at three o'clock; tea or coffee the young ladies usually took alone, or two or three together.

After the Catholics had attended vespers and the Protestants evening prayers, there was supper at nine; after which the young ladies could do as they pleased till half-past ten, when all lights were put out in the building except in the bedrooms.

Maude Luton now discovered, what indeed she had suspected before, that discipline was very lax in the Chateau d'Armand. The price for residence within its favoured and aristocratic walls was high—no less a sum was demanded than four thousand francs yearly; and, besides, there were many extras, which brought the amount fully up to five thousand. A great jealousy existed between the French and the English girls, the latter having much the advantage in point of beauty and complexion. On three days in the week it was forbidden to speak French. This was in order that the French, German, and Italian girls should learn English; on the other four, French alone was spoken. This rule was kept as strictly as possible; but all the others were allowed to be exceeded without difficulty. Etiquette at the table and elsewhere was strictly enforced; but as to the masters and professors, they had a pretty easy time of it, their pupils only taking lessons when they felt disposed. In the course of a week our two young ladies were comfortably settled in their new abode.

Maude de Vere was immensely pleased with everything. She went to chapel morning and evening, to the great delight of the priests, and more especially when they learned she was a wealthy heiress. As for Maude Luton she was not so demonstrative in her delight, but seemed perfectly satisfied with everything. The inmates of this luxurious establishment—for so it was both as regarded the table and all else—were allowed to go out when they pleased, on going through the form of asking the Lady Superior. This merely amounted to a notification that the young lady was going to visit a friend, and would return about such and such a time. Besides the English young lady-pupils, there were five pupil-teachers, who, as part consideration for their board and the other advantages of the Chateau d'Armand, instructed the French, Italians, and Germans in English. These young ladies were allowed the same liberties as the others.

Altogether, it would be difficult to imagine a more pleasant place as a school, or one more dangerous to the morals and dispositions of young girls just budding into womanhood. The liberty which was allowed approached to license. It was seductive, pleasant, insidious, but well calculated to disqualify a girl for quiet, domestic life. It is true that the greater part of the pupils were wealthy, and had friends in the immediate neighbourhood. But this was not so as regarded the English girls, whose friends were for the most part across the Channel, and who were exposed to all sorts of temptations; the least among which was conversion, or perversion—which ever the reader pleases—to the Romish Church.

At first, and for some considerable time, Miss De Vere

did not like to go out even into the grounds alone; but Maude Luton soon talked her out of this weakness. She persuaded her to stroll into a neighbouring suburb on several occasions to make some little purchases; and ere they had been there three months the young lady was not afraid to go to Paris and back without her friend.

Time passed pleasantly enough. Maude Luton studied diligently, seeking the society of the Italian and French girls to perfect herself in the accents. In this, as in all she undertook, she succeeded admirably.

Maude de Vere did not trouble herself so much on the subject; but insensibly her French improved, as did her spirits—at least for the first two months. After this time, however, there came slowly but surely a change over her. She had fits of deep gloom alternated by bursts of noisy gaiety. Her talk at most times was wild and extravagant. Maude Luton, however, would listen to her with great gravity, curiously regarding her the while, as a naturalist might some strange bird or animal.

When the gloomy fits were on her, the chapel was her favourite resort; the priests and nuns—who had free admission to the chateau at all times—her chosen companions. But at these times her friend Maude Luton attended her closely, as though to protect her from the designs of these people, who doubtless wished to secure both her soul and her wealth for their Church.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A MYSTERIOUS CORRESPONDENCE

THE two Maudes had been five months at the Chateau d'Armand, when one day Sydney Davenport, to his surprise, received a letter from Maude Luton. Knowing her proud nature, he had not expected under the circumstances that she would have written to him. It was a most singular letter, and caused him much uneasiness. Maude began by regretting the misunderstanding which had arisen between them; for which she entirely blamed herself. This was plain and straightforward enough. But then followed a long rambling account of the chateau; its inmates, the life they led in Paris; the neighbourhood; mingled up with religious discussion, arguments used by the priests to convert the pupils, and much else,—all written in the most confused and unintelligible manner.

“Good heavens!” cried Sydney Davenport, “what can have come to Maude Luton? Has she taken leave of her senses? Is she going mad?” He checked himself suddenly as the words arose to his lips, and continued his perusal of the letter, as the best means of driving away the unwelcome thought. Then the letter went on to complain of the writer’s health. She was ill, she said; and people did all they could to annoy her. There was a conspiracy among the girls, many of whom were

her enemies, to render her unhappy. She was not sure her life was safe. However, she would defeat them yet, and take a terrible vengeance.

There was much more in the letter, but all in the same strain ; wild, unconnected, and almost incomprehensible. The writing too was very strange and cramped. It did not seem a bit like the easy flowing hand of Maude Luton. And yet it was her writing, for there was her signature at the bottom. A cold perspiration broke out on Sydney's forehead as he reached the end of this extraordinary letter. He had by no means forgotten Maude Luton. Despite the foolish quarrel which had arisen between them, her memory was yet dear to him, and inwardly he looked forward to the day when they should meet again. This letter horrified him. He felt certain that she could not have been in her right senses when she wrote it. He called to mind now the strange expression her eyes had sometimes assumed, her fits of absence, and other traits and peculiarities, which long ago had given rise to some vague misgivings on his part. Was it indeed the terrible fact that she was going mad—that a wild excitable imagination and powerful mind should have overthrown her intellect? The thought was horrible. As he pictured to himself that gloriously handsome girl, a hopeless lunatic, inmate of a padded cell, with cropped hair, staring eyes, and drivelling mouth, he absolutely shuddered. Then he presently clutched at a gleam of hope. She spoke of being unwell physically. Perhaps she wrote in the early stages of a fever—in a half delirious state of mind ; or perhaps for a joke she was trying to frighten him. No that could

not be; so he dismissed it from his mind. To joke in such a manner he felt was an impossibility for Maude Luton. So, after long thought, he took pen and ink, and sat down to write—not to her, he could not for the life of him reply to that mad letter—but to Miss de Vere. He had already written once or twice to this young lady; but finding her a bad correspondent, he had ceased to do so, thinking that she did not wish to incur the trouble of replying. This letter was kind; and after inquiring as to her own health, he expressed much anxiety on the score of Maude Luton, who he said he knew must be very unwell.

A day or two later there came a reply to this epistle. It was, if possible, a greater shock to him than the letter of Maude Luton herself. Miss de Vere began by complaining of her own sorrows and annoyances. It appeared that some of the English girls tormented and laughed at her on account of her strict attendance at chapel. She was, she said, very unhappy and dissatisfied with her lot. Her life was profitless—there was no peace no happiness; and she yearned for the calm serenity of a convent, whence all the troubles and cares of this life are for ever banished. She wished she was not an heiress; wealth only brought misery and self-reproach. Happiness was only to be found in true religion. Much more to this effect caused him to conclude that she had been fascinated by the magnificent ritual of the Romish Church, and half cajoled by wily priests and nuns to come over. Then the letter went on to speak of her companion:

“ You ask after Maude Luton. She too is very unhappy at times. I do not know what to make of her, she is so wild

and incoherent. She sometimes flies into violent passions, and yesterday told me I was mad. She has got strange ideas in her head; says she is being robbed of her rights; that there is a conspiracy against her. Sometimes she will insist upon calling herself Miss De Vere, and has all sorts of strange whims and vagaries. She takes long walks by herself; at least she is absent for a long time together, and says she has been for a walk. Altogether, I do not know what to make of her. Though in one way I like this place very much, I wish we had never come here. There seems nothing but trouble and annoyance. Yesterday a very strange thing happened; I hardly know how to explain it to you. Maude Luton and I sleep together in a large double-bedded room. Adjoining this there is a small room, in which we take our tea together in the evening. Well, after tea last night I was sitting in a low arm-chair before the fire, when a singular feeling came over me. I seemed to go off in a sort of trance. I had vivid waking dreams, or rather visions. I fancied myself back at Holford Hall with Maude and you. Suddenly Maude began addressing me in a reproachful manner, charging me to surrender everything; that I was not the rightful heiress, but an impostor. Then I saw a procession of priests approaching, chanting as they walked slowly on. I heard the most beautiful music, rising and falling in glorious harmony. An aged priest advanced from the others, and holding the cross above my head, adjured me to repent. Then I thought I fell on my knees, saying, 'Father, I consent. Do with me as you please.' Then I thought he laid his hand on my head and blessed me. The music pealed forth in a glorious, joyful strain; a bright sunlight streamed on



the scene; in the distance I could see Holford Hall, surrounded with a halo of glory. I turned my eyes next on the aged priest who was bending over me. Slowly his grey beard seemed to turn black, and his robes assumed another shape. I awoke myself with quite a start, and found a gentleman bending over me, looking in my eyes, and holding my hand in his. Maude Luton was there. I screamed out, and asked him who he was. 'Hush dear,' said Maude; 'this gentleman is a friend of mine—a doctor. You are feverish, and require a little medicine.' 'No; I am not feverish,' I remember crying out; 'I am quite well. Why did you wake me? I had such beautiful dreams.' 'You were not asleep, dear,' she said. 'Your eyes have been open; and you have been talking the whole time.' 'I wish you would leave me, and take your friend with you,' I said; and then they both went away, and again the beautiful vivid dreams came back. Was it not strange I have never felt anything in the least like it before?"

There was nothing else in the letter of any importance whatever. When Sydney Davenport had finished reading it, he remained with it open in his hand before him for some considerable time.

"A most extraordinary letter," he said, speaking to himself. "In some respects it confirms my worst fears; in others it suggests fresh mysteries. What is the meaning of this strange dream or hallucination of Miss De Vere? Is she too going mad? Is it infectious? Has she caught the fever from Maude Luton? The description she gives of the trance-like state in which she was, the vivid dreams and the partial unconsciousness, seems to me wonderfully

like the effect of opium, or some other drug of a similar nature. But surely the girl cannot have contracted the terrible use of opium-eating? She certainly says not a word about it. No; it cannot be,—she herself is puzzled to account for it."

Assuredly Sydney Davenport was puzzled, and knew not in the least what to make of these two strange letters. It was evident that a change was coming over both these girls. Of the two he felt more alarmed for Maude Luton. He knew her nervous, passionate, powerful nature,—a nature which from its very strength would be a more tempting prey to the demon insanity than a weak mind. Maude Luton mad! He could not dismiss the horrid thought from his mind. "I will go over to Paris and see them," he said suddenly. "Yes; I will run down to Cumberford and speak to David Luton about it at once."

He carried his intention into effect without delay; and the next afternoon saw him again an inmate of the surgeon's house at Cumberford. To his surprise David, who seldom objected to anything, in this case did so strongly. He did not think it would be advisable to disturb the two girls at their studies. Besides, it would hardly look well for Sydney, a single man, and no relation to either lady, to visit them at a boarding-school. In the face of this unexpected opposition on the part of David Luton, Sydney of course relinquished his intention.

He wrote back, however, to both Miss De Vere and Maude Luton; to the latter in the first place, for he was more seriously alarmed for her than for the other. Perhaps too the fact that he thought more of her, cared more for her, than he did for the heiress, had weight with him.

This letter was long, and barely hinted at the wildness, almost incomprehensibility of hers. But he gave her some earnest advice.

"Do not," he said, "give way to foolish, because impossible dreams. Do not waste your youth and energy in the pursuit of a chimera. You know to what I allude. I fear it still preys on your mind, and makes you unhappy. Beware lest constant brooding on the subject have a baneful influence on your nature. Accept your position in this world, which after all, is not so bad a one. You are young, talented, beautiful. You have in your cousin David a kind relation and protector. Your many good qualities and charms of person and mind must always find you friends, among whom I am happy to number myself. If ever you are in want of anything, and it is in my power to assist you, I will promise you to do so to the best of my ability. Again I implore you to give up striving after the impossible. I cannot but think that your life abroad is exercising a most unhealthy effect on your moral nature—perhaps injuring your mind. Surely you are now sufficiently accomplished, for all reasonable purposes. A girl so apt and quick as you, would by this time certainly have acquired the purest Parisian accent. Would it not be well for you to return home and enjoy for a time the quiet of an English country-life? I, for one, am most anxious to see you."

There was much more in the letter, but nothing which need here be noticed. Perhaps the writer's anxiety caused him to make it longer than needful.

Maude Luton when she received it read it all through. She locked herself in the bedroom shared by the two girls

and devoured every word. Well she knew to what Sydney alluded when he spoke of her life at the *pension* having an evil effect on her moral nature and on her mind. She knew he feared that she would go mad, and did not seem horrified, or even alarmed at the idea.

"As to my moral nature," she said sadly, "that has, I believe, suffered. Who could live on the victim of a perpetual wrong and yet be pure-hearted and amiable as an angel? Not I, certainly. I believe in time I shall be a wicked woman. There is but one thing on earth which has power to restrain me, and that—that is you, Sydney Davenport." She was alone, and kissed the letter passionately. "At least," she said, "it is some satisfaction to have healed the breach which existed between us. I feel happier now that I know you still take an interest in me—ay, though I know you think me mad, or next to it."

She carefully folded the much-prized letter, and locked it in her writing-case, went downstairs, where in the drawing-room she found Maude de Vere, who was busy perusing a letter she had received from the same writer by the same post. It was of a very different stamp from that which Maude Luton had received. He strove by light gossip to amuse her, and laughingly alluded to her dream. She had been feverish, he said. As for her unhappiness, that was caused he thoroughly believed, by the persecutions and worryings of the priests and nuns, whose sole object was to convert her to their religion for the sake of her wealth. Sydney Davenport was unsparing and unscrupulous in his attacks on these people. He gave instances in which they had acted from the most flagitious and mercenary motives,

and solemnly warned her against listening to them. His written words had great effect on the young girl, for she had always looked up to and admired him as some one supremely wise and good. So for a time the insidious attacks of the priests and nuns, who eternally beset her, were rendered innocuous.

As for Maude Luton, armed with the knowledge that Sydney Davenport yet cared for her, she was for a day or two more happy than she had been since she came to this place. But then she grew restless; and it was plain a struggle was going on in her mind.

"If I could only take his advice," she said to herself, "it might be better for me. If I could only rest under the consciousness of being deeply wronged; if I could forget, I might be happier. But I cannot. I cannot rest under the withering ban of being nobody's daughter. I will strive for my rights, my name, and inheritance, and attain them by any means. I am Maude de Vere—of that I am certain—and as such, rightful heiress of the broad domains of Holford Hall. I will be known as Maude de Vere. I will be mistress of my own. I will, I will—by fair means, by legal proof, or otherwise. I will have my rights."

What thoughts now flashed through that busy brain! What plans and schemes now occupied her mind! That she had some purpose in view was evident to any close observer. Her actions, her words and manner, were all too studied to be the result of carelessness or chance. She was persistently labouring on towards an object which she hoped to grasp,—which she might succeed in all but obtaining.

But it was written in the book that she should not thereby attain ease and peace of mind. And what is this secret purpose towards which Maude Luton is steadily labouring night and day? or rather, what is the mode by which she hopes to attain her end? Her purpose is the same as ever. She will assert her rights, assume her name, and take possession of her property. This has become almost a monomania with her now. How she hoped to gain her end; by what desperate means she strove for final triumph; and what was the result of this supreme desperate effort, will be told in the succeeding chapters.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

MAUDE LUTON's letters home to England were very few. She wrote two more to Sydney Davenport at long intervals, and three to her cousin David. All these were similar in their style ; at one place melancholy, then suddenly incoherent and disjointed. She constantly hinted at or spoke plainly of those who were banded together against her. Sydney Davenport with each letter grew sadder, and the conviction was unwillingly forced upon him that Maude Luton—his beautiful, talented, high-spirited Maude—was going mad,—was already affected in her mind. He wrote short replies to her letters, containing only expressions of kindness and good-will. He was careful not to let her see by his notes that he was in any way alarmed about her. To do so, he thought, would be to make matters worse. But to Maude de Vere he wrote at greater length. Though he did not say so in words, he gave her to understand plainly enough, he thought, that, judging from her letters, he had serious fears for Miss Luton's mind. He spoke much of her general health ; made many inquiries about her,—as to whether she was happy, or had any annoyances, and much more. He implored Miss de Vere not to irritate or vex herself in any way, and finally begged to know the name of the medical man who attended them. This done, he posted the two letters, and anxiously awaited a reply.

In Paris it is even more uncommon than in England for young ladies of the upper classes to walk the streets unprotected. The *grisettes* and shopkeepers' daughters, to a limited extent exercise the privilege ; but it is indeed rare to see a young and well-dressed lady alone, unless she belong to that fair but frail class, the *lorettes*. But on a certain February evening, an elegantly-dressed girl, evidently a lady, might be seen walking in the Faubourg St. Honoré, apparently not knowing where she was, for she looked up at the inscriptions on every street-corner, and gazed frequently about her. She did not keep to the large thoroughfare of the Rue St. Honoré ; but presently turning to the right, dived down among smaller streets and lanes. She looked carefully at every door on which there was a brass-plate denoting the profession of the owner, and appeared to be in search of something. Presently her walk brought her to the vicinity of the Rue d'Amsterdam ; and just at this time a light rain began to fall. The young lady, though she knew it not, had been followed by a gentleman for the last half hour, who had kept just so far behind her as to escape her notice. But when the rain commenced to fall, seeing she had no umbrella, he quickened his pace in order to overtake her. He was a young man—certainly not more than thirty years of age—tall and dark, with good features, light eyes. There was an expression of restlessness, however, on his handsome face,—a wild look, as though he had been in the habit of denying himself nothing he could obtain, putting no bridle on his passions and desires. In short he had the appearance of belonging to that class who gratify their own pleasures at whatever cost.



His eye had a bold admiring glance in it as he looked at the elegant figure of the girl he was following; but the moment he stepped up to her he schooled his glance and voice to the most respectful pitch as he said,

"Pardon, mademoiselle, if I am mistaken; I perceive you are without an umbrella."

"Monsieur?" interrupted the young lady indignantly.

"Pray allow me to finish. I see this; and I imagine that in addressing mademoiselle I speak to a countrywoman of my own; also that she is in search of something."

"You have been watching me," the young lady said in English.

"Not at all; at least only for the last minute,—since I have been walking behind you."

"How did you know I was English?"

"I judged so by your figure and walk. The French ladies have an abominable mincing gait; and as to their figures, I never saw a Frenchwoman with a perfect figure,—a figure like your own."

The young lady's countenance relaxed a little from its severe expression when she heard the stranger was a countryman. To his flattery, however, she paid no heed whatever.

"It is true I am English," she said; "also that I am in search of that which it seems I cannot find."

"I shall be happy to assist you if it is in my power," he said politely; "I am well acquainted with Paris."

"You are well acquainted with Paris?" she said musingly. "Do you know many English doctors?"

"Strange to say I am, or rather have been, in the medical profession myself. My uncle, Dr. Melhuish, is still in practice; he is physician to the Embassy, and attends the great majority of English visitors of rank."

"Thank you; I do not wish for a fashionable physician," she said coldly.

"Oh, by no means. I should never recommend my uncle to you. I know all about his practice, having been his assistant, until by the death of my mother I was in an independent position. Dr. Melhuish is too busy—has too many patients already,—more than he can do justice to. Allow me to offer my umbrella. Good heavens, how the rain is coming down! I declare it is quite a storm. Had you not better seek shelter for a short time? Well here is a *café*,—I assure you it is a highly-respectable one."

The young lady—giving one glance at the dark sky, from which the rain was pouring in torrents, another at her new acquaintance—entered without hesitation, and took her seat at one of the little marble-tables separated by a curtain from the rest of the room.

He seated himself opposite to her, with the full glare of the light in his face. She had then a good opportunity of taking a rapid survey of his form and features. At a glance she saw he was handsome; but there was something which repelled her in the expression of his face. There was there depicted restlessness, unscrupulousness, and want of principle. The mouth too, though well-formed, was certainly sensual; but withal there was a firm look about the angles, as though he would not be one readily to abandon a project once taken up with.

The garcon here coming to receive orders, the lady asked for a cup of coffee, the gentleman, a "demi-bout-cille," of Macon.

"How the rain comes down!" said the gentleman presently. "I trust you have not far to return home."

She had been thinking deeply for some time. "Shall I trust him?" she was saying to herself. "I must, if I am to accept his aid at all. I don't like the thought; and yet something urges me to do so. I have an idea that in this man I have found one who can be useful. At all events, half measures can do no good. I will risk it."

"Do you know the establishment of Madame Dumonney?" she asked aloud.

"Madame Dumonney, of the Chateau d'Armand?" he replied in some surprise.

"Yes."

"Assuredly. Every one knows it by name. You come from there?"

"I do. I will give you my card."

Suiting the action to the word, she took out her purse, and handed him a card. He read thereon, "Miss De Vere, Holford Hall."

"I shall be very happy to be of any service to you, Miss De Vere," he said, evidently impressed by the card; "and since you have so far honoured me, I had better return the compliment, and give you my name."

She read on the piece of pasteboard he gave her, "Mr. Edward Melhuish, Rue Lepelletier, 14 (au troisième)." "Mr. Melhuish," she said, after looking vaguely at the

card for some considerable time, as though she could not decipher it, "you say you are acquainted with all the English medical men in Paris?"

"Yes. I don't believe there is one whom I do not know by name; but I have a list at home,—a complete catalogue. If you would not mind waiting a short time, I would fetch it."

"No, no, I thank you,—not to-night. See, the rain has ceased now. I must be returning."

"But I shall see you again?" he asked anxiously, as she rose.

"Yes, yes,—to-morrow night,"

"When?—where?"

"Here—an hour before this time."

"Can I do nothing further for you to-night?"

"Yes,—call a conveyance."

He did so; and she, pausing before she got in, gave him her hand: "Good-night, Mr. Melhuish; I shall see you to-morrow evening."

After she was gone, he stood gazing after the retreating hackney-coach. "Well," he said to himself, "this is indeed an adventure."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE BEGINNING OF A PLOT.

A FACT that most people must have observed is this: the awkwardness and constraint between two people on a first interview is very much qualified on a second meeting, though really they are not one whit better acquainted. Thus it was with Mr. Edward Melhuish and Miss De Vere, who on her part was punctual to her appointment.

"Shall we again take refuge—this time from the crowd, not the rain—in the *café*?" he asked.

"Yes; I think it will be as well,—we can talk better."

She spoke in a quiet collected way, as though she well knew what she was about; and he leading the way, they again entered. As before, she took a cup of coffee. This time, however, he ordered a bottle of sparkling Moselle; and by a glance he shot at her as he called for it, seemed as though he had some idea that she might not refuse to partake of it. Slowly sipping her coffee in teaspoonfuls, the lady remained silent for some few moments; and then raising her eyes to his face, said—

"Mr. Melhuish, I am going to place considerable confidence in you."

"On my word and honour, you shall have no cause to regret it."

"I can depend upon you?"

"You can. Anything you may please to confide in me I shall consider inviolate."

"I spoke to you yesterday about English doctors, and gave you to understand that I was in search of one."

"Yes; and I told you that I knew every English practitioner in Paris, from my uncle, the physician to the Embassy, to old Solomon Esher, the charlatan mad doctor."

Miss De Vere started so suddenly as to overturn her cup of coffee at the words "mad doctor."

"Ah, how unfortunate! Shall I call for another cup? or may I offer you a glass of this Moselle? It is, I assure you, excellent."

"No, no, I thank you. What is it you are saying?"

"I was speaking of Solomon Esher."

"Yes, you called him the mad doctor. Is he then mad?"

"By no means; but he has a reputation for great skill in the treatment of diseases of the mind and brain. He is reputed to be immensely wealthy, but nevertheless lives in the most miserable manner in a little dog-hole of a house in a low street close to the river in the Quartier Latin."

"Avaricious, unscrupulous, and a miser,—is that his character?"

"You could not have expressed it better. He is exactly what you say. Strange tales are whispered about concerning him. It is not openly said that he sells poisons at once deadly and indiscoverable, but people believe he does. It is certain that he has rich and noble patients, for carriages sometimes stop at the corner of the street, and the inmates

thereof have often been watched to the dark den of Solomon Esher. Then too he has an interest in a mad-house about twelve miles from Paris. People say, indeed, that he is the proprietor thereof, and not the Madame Hérault, to whom it ostensibly belongs. Certain it is that he has sent patients there from his own place, where he has a strong room for their especial reception."

All this time Miss De Vere was listening with the most eager attention. So eager indeed was her look, that her companion noticed it.

"You seem deeply interested!"

"I am—I am. I will tell you why presently. Go on. Tell me more about this singular old man. Are his patients well and kindly treated? I mean those mentally afflicted,—those whom he sends to this asylum."

"I believe they are both kindly and skilfully treated. He has had a curious sort of conveyance made, windowless, thickly padded, and very strong. This is for the conveyance of his insane patients; and in this he himself goes over every day to the Maison Noir, or black house, as folks call it. When he has a patient inside he rides on the box with the driver."

"And you say he is visited principally by the wealthy?"

"I never knew a poor man enter his shop. Once a poor fellow was carried in who had been run over in the street. Solomon Esher examined him, and then turning to those who had brought him, asked if he had any money or if they were disposed to pay for him. Only three sous were found in his pockets, and those who brought him were as poor as himself. 'You had better take him to the hospital,' said

Solomon, with cruel heartlessness. 'He will probably die on the road ; that, however, is nothing to me. I do not attend people gratuitously ; and if he has no money he must take his chance,—live or die. I shall not take the case.' And so the poor bleeding wretch was taken off to the hospital, and died a few minutes after his admission."

"How dreadful!" said the young lady, with a little shudder. What a cruel monster he must be! and yet I daresay very clever."

"He has the reputation of being so! indeed the ignorant and superstitious declare that he seeks and obtains unholy aid. Some of his cures have been almost miraculous. You see I know a great deal about him, for I reside in the Quartier Latin. Formerly I lived there for economy's sake ; now it is a matter of choice. I would not give up my chambers *en garçon, au troisième*, for a much more pretentious and aristocratic abode.

"I have been listening to all you have told me carefully, and am of opinion that this miserly old doctor will suit my purpose. There is one thing, however,—is he trustworthy? It is a most delicate affair with which I should have to entrust him, and I should wish the utmost discretion and silence observed."

"Money will insure his silence, as I told you before. He is avaricious ; and I fully believe his aid might be purchased in any criminal undertaking provided there was plenty of gold."

"In this case there need be no lack of money. I am rich ; and as the health and welfare of a dear friend are at stake, I care not what expense I go to."



"It is, then, on behalf of a friend you wish to enlist the skill of Dr. Solomon Esher."

"It is a young lady who came with me to this country, and who is now with me at Madame Dumonney's, that is ill. She has strange delusions, wanders in her mind, talks to herself, and altogether gives me the greatest alarm. Her name is Miss Luton."

"Luton!" exclaimed Melhuish. "Why, I was at St. George's Hospital with a fellow of that name—a hard-working, quiet, studious young man. David Luton was his name."

"You knew David Luton?" she asked, starting up; and then remembering she was in a public place, she seated herself again.

"Yes; I knew him well. Is this young lady of whom you speak any relation?"

"His cousin, sir. I too know Mr. Luton well."

"His cousin! And you say she is mentally afflicted!"

Miss de Vere was buried in thought and did not at once reply to his question. Presently, however, there came a look on her face as if she had made up her mind how to act.

"I did not hear what you said just now, sir."

"I asked if Miss Luton was mentally afflicted!"

"I hope and trust not—at least not permanently; but I must say I am very uneasy. However, since you are acquainted with Mr. David Luton, there can be no harm in your seeing the young lady yourself. I shall be glad of your opinion, you being also a medical man."

"I shall be most happy to give any assistance in my power."

"Then if you will come to the Château d'Armand to-morrow evening you shall see my friend and judge for yourself. Then we can talk over what is best to be done."

Already these two people, till the day before perfect strangers, had grown confidential. They had now something in common, and they parted each satisfied with the other.

"She's a splendid girl," said Mr. Edward Melhuish to himself as he strolled into the Palais-Royal. "I never saw a handsomer or more lady-like one. I declare I'm head over ears in love with her already."

Mr. Edward Melhuish was well satisfied with the progress of his adventure. He had taken care to make inquiries concerning this Miss de Vere, and learned without trouble that she was a wealthy heiress. Here was a chance for him to retrieve his fortunes, which his reckless extravagance had much damaged. Young, beautiful, and rich, what more could he hope for or expect in a wife. As for the young lady she too seemed satisfied with what had occurred.

"Strange," she mused, "that he should have known David Luton! It really looks like fate,—destiny. All things urge me on—fortune favours me. I cannot do better than trust this Mr. Melhuish—trust him, at least, so far as I dare. To-morrow—to-morrow will decide her destiny and mine. Alas, poor Maude!—yours is a sad fate; and yet not entirely so. Who can say that aberration of intellect is all misery? She is mad,—she must be mad. I am afraid so. She has always had a tendency that way. Thank heaven, I am free from even a suspicion."

The young lady was thinking of her unfortunate

friend, on whose behalf she was about to engage this singular Dr. Solomon Esher. As she thought on the subject a shudder shot through her frame more than once.

"To-morrow—to-morrow I shall hear the opinion of this Mr. Melhuish, who, being himself in the medical profession, will be able to form a correct judgment. From what he says I shall be able to guess what the old miser-doctor will think. Think! He can only think as I think. He shall so think—he shall, he shall!"

That night Maude Luton sought Madame Dumonney. She looked weary, and spoke as though she were utterly tired out. "Madame, Miss de Vere expects a gentleman to visit us to-morrow—a medical gentleman. She is anxious about her health and mine."

"You look pale and ill, mademoiselle; and as for Miss de Vere, I begin to get alarmed for her. She is always so feverish-looking, and her eyes are unnaturally bright."

"And yet she will insist that it is I who am ill?"

"Her affection for you makes her anxious."

"Doubtless, madame. Will you see that when the English medical gentleman comes to-morrow evening, he is shown up to our room at once; Miss De Vere is very anxious to see him."

"Assuredly, mademoiselle. I wish you good-night." Madame always spoke in their native tongue to the English young ladies.

"Good-night madame. I shall not rise to breakfast in the morning; I feel very weak and tired."

"Ah, Miss Luton, you walk too much; you go out too much for your strength. I cannot but think that those lonely excursions are bad for you."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE TWO MAUDES.

MR. EDWARD MELHUISSH was shown up to the little room which the two Maudes called their own, immediately on his arrival. His companion of the previous evening greeted him cordially; meeting him at the door, and after shaking hands with him, conducting him to a seat by the fire. This room was warmed, in deference to the tastes of the two English young ladies (one of whom was so wealthy) by means of a grate, instead of the economical but abominable close stove in which all foreigners delight. The blaze from the fire gave quite a sufficient light, irrespective of the solitary wax-candle which burned on a side-table. On the other side to that where Edward Melhuish took his seat, there lay reclining on a couch a young girl, apparently fast asleep. He at once judged rightly, that this was the patient about whom Miss De Vere had expressed herself so anxious. The sleep in which she lay was not a sound one; for she was all the time muttering to herself, and restlessly moving her hands. Going over to her, the other young lady endeavoured to awake her, in which effort she succeeded so far that the sleeper half rose and stared wildly around. Edward Melhuish shuddered as the girl's glance fell on him. She regarded him for a moment with a vacant stony stare; and then her eyes began to wander rapidly around the room.

"She is very bad to-night,—worse than I have seen her at all," whispered his companion.

Melhuish rose, and taking the candle from the small table where it stood, placed it close beside the invalid. She gazed at it unblinkingly, and then turned her eyes slowly to his face. She suffered him to take her hand and feel her pulse, and commenced murmuring, in a low, scarcely audible voice. It was impossible to catch the meaning of what she said, so wild and incoherent were her words; but mixed up with her rambling discourse, there came constant reference to beautiful gardens, flowers, fountains, and sunlight.

"Hark!" she cried suddenly, "they come. Listen to the music; grand, solemn music—glorious music borne on the breeze with the perfume of the flowers! Oh, this is indeed happiness,—pleasure such as mortals can never hope to taste. See, they come, glittering with purple and gold. Flowers strew our path; the air is laden with incense. Ah, this is indeed a paradise!"

The two listeners looked one in the face of the other.

"I think I will bid you adieu for the present, Miss De Vere," Edward Melhuish said in a low tone.

"Miss De Vere!" exclaimed the young lady, suddenly checking herself in the midst of her ravings. "Who speaks of Miss De Vere? I am Miss De Vere,—Miss Maude De Vere, of Holford Hall! Who wants me?"

Edward Melhuish's companion drew him away out of earshot.

"Alas," she said, "one of her most persistent delusions! Whatever you do, do not contradict or thwart her."

Then she went back to the invalid, and caused her to lay her head unresistingly on the pillow.

"Go to sleep, Maude; you are tired."

"Yes, yes; I will go to sleep; but give me some tea first, I am so thirsty. No, not tea, it tastes so bitter; I will have lemonade. I like tea, but I wish it was not so bitter. Yes, I will have tea,—only put plenty of sugar in it—plenty of sugar, dear Maude; and then I will go back to the garden. Where are the flowers and the grand music? Hark!"

She closed her eyes, and seemed to be listening intently. Her lips moved softly, a faint whisper issuing from them. Her friend took advantage of this half-sleeping state, and stole softly away to her visitor, who stood by the door silently looking on.

When they were outside in the dimly-lighted corridor she said to him in a voice which faltered a little,

"Well, sir, what do you think of my unfortunate friend? she is very bad to-night, is she not?"

"There can be but one opinion,"

"And that is—"

"That she has lost her reason, at least for a time. Perhaps Solomon Esher will be able to cure her. His skill, they say, is marvellous."

"Ah, but, alas, he will want to take her away from me, will he not?"

"Take her away from you?"

"Yes,—remove her to this asylum of his."

I do not know. Perhaps he may recommend—We shall see."

"If it were for her good, I would consent willingly,

although it would be a great grief to me to lose her. Poor Maude! sad indeed is your fate."

"It is a very singular delusion this," he said, "that she should fancy herself Miss De Vere. Can you account for it?"

"Scarcely. It has been growing upon her for months. Our Christian names are the same—we are both called Maude—and that may have had something to do with it. It is very dreadful. I hardly know what to do. I ought to write to her friends—to her cousin, Mr. David Luton; but I don't know how to touch so delicate a subject."

"I am going to England shortly," he said. "If you will intrust the mission to me, I will gladly undertake it. I know David Luton, and being in the profession, I could freely explain my views and opinion of this sad case."

"You are very kind," she cried eagerly. "If you would see David Luton and tell him of his cousin's unhappy state, explaining to him that she had every possible care and attention bestowed upon her, I should be so much obliged."

"As I said before, Miss De Vere, I shall be only too happy to serve you in any way. A smile from you will more than repay any little trouble I may take."

"Thank you, thank you. And now about this Dr. Solomon Esher."

"I will see him at once—this evening."

"And when shall we appoint for him to see the patient?"

"To-morrow."

"No, not to-morrow. Let me have one day's notice

before he comes ; and also I should wish to know at what hour he will come, so that I shall be prepared for him."

"I will let you know without fail. Good-night Miss De Vere."

"Good-night, I am much obliged to you."

She shook hands with him. As he held hers he pressed it gently, and fancied there was a slight answering pressure.

"A splendid girl. I believe I am all right there. Once lay a woman under an obligation, and the day is won. Ah, Maude de Vere, beautiful Maude ! you shall be mine." Thus soliloquising, he entered the hired carriage he had waiting, and ordered the man to drive direct to the Quartier Latin.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

## SOLOMON ESHER'S DEN.

IN a room at the back of a low dingy little shop sat an old man at a table poring over an account-book. The room was nearly devoid of furniture; there was a table and four chairs, and a piece of matting did duty as carpet. On the walls were some shelves supporting bottles and medical preparations. A few books and a large chest in one corner completed the furniture of this room. The door which opened into the shop, had a window let into it; and covering this window was a piece of yellow gauze, which enabled the occupant to see without being himself observed.

This was Solomon Esher, the English doctor, who had so wide and unenviable a reputation, despite his skill. It would be difficult, almost impossible, to pronounce with any certainty as to the age of this personage. He had neither whiskers, beard, nor indeed hair visible. A black-velvet skull-cap came quite over his head, low down on his forehead, and covering his ears. He was small, thin, and with a remarkable stoop in the shoulders; his face was of a dull red-brick colour; the expression of the features sharp; the mouth hard-looking; the nose hooked; the eyes piercing, avaricious, and cruel. There were no wrinkles to denote great age, and yet there was something in the whole appearance of the doctor that impressed people

with the idea that he was an old man. His hands were long, brown, and thin; the fingers, with their sharp-pointed nails, reminding one of the talons of a vulture. Presently, as he sat poring over his books, there was heard the sound of a little bell in the shop, which, attached to the door, gave warning when anyone entered. He looked up sharply—a gleam of pleasurable excitement in his eyes—and opening the door, said, “Enter, Monsieur Deloraine; I am at your service.”

A young man attired in the extreme of fashion passed into the little back room, and with a little gesture of anger and impatience threw himself on one of the rickety chairs.

“Monsieur seems annoyed!” said the old doctor in French—which he spoke as well as English.

“Annoyed? Yes, indeed; and little wonder. The count, my father, has sent for a notary to make his will.”

“And you fear that in that important document he will not make due mention of Monsieur Camille Deloraine,—eh, eh, eh?” and the little doctor laughed a hard dry cackling laugh.

“A truce to your jokes—this is no joking matter; and I am in no mood to be laughed at. Madame, my stepmother, will get every sou. The old madman proclaims aloud that he will leave her everything.”

“Atrocious wickedness!—unheard-of depravity!” cried the doctor, throwing up his hands in mock horror. “What shall we say of a man who prefers to leave his property to a good wife rather than to a bad son?”

“Curse you and your jests,” shouted the young man; “I didn’t come here to be laughed at.” And so speaking, he

started to his feet, and approaching the doctor, shook his fist at him menacingly. "Look you here, Monsieur Medecin Anglaise, if you make a butt of me, or laugh at my misfortunes, I will break every bone in your skin."

"Eh, eh, eh? Strong language! that will hardly mend the matter, or give you your father's fortune."

"Once for all, will you aid me in this or not?"

"Aid you! How can I aid you?"

"Look here, Doctor Esher, you are no fool, no innocent,—you know what I mean. The count is mad, obviously raving mad."

"And you would have me, I presume, convey him to any quiet place in the country, and there detain him until in the ordinary course of nature Monsieur Camille Deloraine should inherit the property?"

"Exactly."

"Then allow me to inform you it cannot be done."

"Then I have come here for nothing; lost my time, and made myself a laughing-stock for an old rogue of a doctor! I could strangle you as you stand grinning there."

"An old rogue of a doctor! By Jove, sir, your words are not complimentary; still, however, I can make allowances for your excited state. How much money have you brought with you?"

"What has that to do with you?"

"Simply this: You want my aid, I want your money."

"You will then assist me?" cried the young man eagerly.

"If it suits me. I again ask you how much money have you brought with you?"

"About eleven hundred francs," replied his visitor surlily.

"Good! Give me, then, a thousand francs."

"A thousand francs! and leave myself with barely enough to pay my supper?"

"Exactly," replied the doctor curtly.

"And if I do so, what do you propose to do in return?"

"To give you my advice and assistance."

"In what way?"

"I do not choose to be questioned. Give me the money or go. I am busy."

Monsieur Camille produced his purse, and counted out a thousand francs in notes and gold.

"Here is your money; and now let me see what you will do for it."

The old miser arose, opened an iron safe, and carefully locked up the money. Then he reached down a small porcelain jar, and taking a pinch of powder therefrom, laid it on a sheet of paper, and by means of a gummy substance began rolling up little pills. When he had used all the powder, he folded the pills in the piece of paper, and tossed them carelessly to the young man.

"There!—take these. See that they are administered within the next twelve hours. You have no difficulty in gaining access to your father?"

"No; he is not suspicious, only angry and abusive."

"Ah!—good. Drop them into his soup, or what is better, his coffee, which will disguise the bitter taste. He will not make his will, I will guarantee, for at least a week after he has taken these."

"But not—they are not—they will not—"

"You would ask if they are poison. I answer you, no. I am not such a fool as to run the risk for a thousand francs."

"They will incapacitate him from making his will for a week?"

"He may make a will; but if he does, it will be a most extraordinary document. You told me just now he was mad. These pills will bring his madness to a crisis."

"Ah, I perceive. But after the week suppose he gets sane, and again insists on making his will?"

"In that case you must come to me with another thousand francs. But your dear papa is old. I know from what you tell me that he is breaking up; softening of the brain is taking place. He will not live long, believe me. You may have to come to me once, or perhaps twice more. By that time it will be finished."

At this moment another ring came to the bell.

"Go," said the doctor imperiously; "here is another patient. I wonder what he wants. Come on some little criminal errand, I doubt not. People do not seek Solomon Esher for a cold, or sore-throat, or bad finger. No, no; those who come here, come with desperate intents, and bring money."

The young man, on whose countenance remorse and horror contended with an expression of savage satisfaction rushed away. He had more than a suspicion that the medicine the doctor had given him would first of all render his father light-headed, and then—then gradually undermine and destroy the springs of life.

As the young Deloraine hastened away the new comer passed in. Solomon Esher looked keenly at him from beneath his heavy brows.

"What can I do for you Mr. Melhuish?" he asked.

"I see you know my name."

"Yes, I know your name, and perhaps your business."

"Impossible!"

"Perhaps so, perhaps not. You have come now from the Chateau d'Armand; I know it well. I have had business there before to-day. Ah, my young friend, I can tell you there have been strange doings in that place. If the noble and wealthy people who send their daughters there, only knew what I know, they would as soon think of sending them to this place, which the neighbours obligingly call the Black House. But now Monsieur Melhuish, let us to business. What is it you require? Is it a love-philter for that charming dark-eyed English girl you were with the other night? Speak, my friend."

"Good heavens! you must be Satan himself."

"Must I indeed?" said Solomon with a grin. "If I were I should not have occasion to ask you the question I am about to ask. Have you money with you,—and how much?"

"It is not for myself I seek your aid, but for a friend—a lady."

"Exactly; one of the inmates of Madame Dumonney's establishment. Ah, my dear young sir, you do not surprise me. I have had applications of a delicate nature from that house before to-day. Who is the young lady?"

The young man seemed quite bewildered by the old man's garrulity and seeming knowledge of the affair.

"Come now, my time is valuable. You wish for my services, and are, I suppose, able and willing to pay?"

"It is not for myself I tell you, but on behalf of a young lady, whose intimate friend wishes the best skill in Paris to be exercised. The young lady is mentally afflicted; and her friend a rich heiress cares not what expense she goes to."

"Oh, oh! Cares not for expense,—eh, eh! There is something in this. You wish then, to retain my services. What am I expected to do?"

"To see the young lady in question—give your opinion on her state, and if necessary have her removed to your place in the country."

A gleam of intelligence shot over the features of Solomon Esher.

"Remove her to my place in the country? Ah, I see,—yes, yes; I will attend the young lady. Mad, of course,—quite mad. But may I ask who profits by her madness?"

"Who profits? Why, no one. Her friend Miss de Vere is in great grief and tribulation."

"De Vere!—the daughter of Stanton de Vere of Holford Hall?"

"I believe she is heiress to Holford Hall. But what do you know of her or her father?"

"She was never a patient of mine,—that is all." Hereupon Solomon Esher became reserved, and would say no more on the subject.

"You haven't answered my question about money

though. If you want my services, I must have a retaining-fee. How much have you brought with you ?”

“Only about two-hundred francs.”

“Ah ! A hundred and fifty will do for me.”

“Avaricious old rascal !” thought Edward Melhuish, as he gave the money with a very bad grace, for at that time he was particularly hard-up.

“When do you want me ?” asked the strange doctor.

“Will the day after to-morrow suit you—in the evening ?”

“Yes.”

“Very well, then, I will call for you here, and take you with me.”

“Don’t make any mistake about me, my young friend. Inform your heiress that if she is rich in sordid wealth, I am rich in science ; and she will have to pay me liberally. Only let her be liberal, and I will do anything she pleases. Repeat these words to her, will you ?”

“I will. All she requires of you is to cure her friend.”

“Ah ! that may be or may not be—as likely one as the other.”

“What do you mean ?”

“I mean what I say ; so be off and don’t hinder me. The day after to-morrow—five o’clock in the evening.”

Edward Melhuish went out, his brain in a whirl. He had not recovered from the effects of the old man’s knowledge of his name, and the place whence he came. He doubted not that Esher also knew his business, and he felt a superstitious dread on that account. He did not stop to think that Solomon Esher might have seen him go in or come out from the Château d’Armand ; nor did he know



that it was on the road to his asylum, which he visited every day.

As soon as he was gone, Solomon Esher rose, and opening the safe, drew out one of the drawers. It contained gold and notes, which the old miser carefully counted and separated. "Seventeen hundred and fifty francs to-day! An excellent day's work, considering that I have never stirred without the door. Seventy pounds sterling! Well done, Solomon Esher. Fortune appears inclined to smile. There is this Miss de Vere. I must find out what her motive is; then bleed her of the golden blood to my heart's content. I wonder if she has complete command of money; I must ascertain. Two-thousand francs at least I will ask for my first visit. If she consents, there is a mine of wealth; for no one would consent without strong and urgent reasons—a stronger reason than any anxiety for a friend." Having tied the notes in bundles, and the gold in *rouleaux*, Solomon Esher placed his gains in the large compartment of the safe, where lay some hundreds of thousands of francs, the accumulations of years, still constantly increasing.

Latterly, as is often the case, his greed increased with his wealth; and he without hesitation undertook for large pecuniary rewards to do that which, were it discovered, would certainly consign him to the galleys, under the provisions of the mild and benignant Napoleon Code.

Solomon Esher had profound knowledge of the properties of drugs—consummate skill in their administration. Vainly did analysts attempt to make out what were the ingredients he used in his mixtures; they were uniformly unsuccessful. Though he had been mixed up in some very suspicious cases, no trace of poison or of anything dele-

terious could ever be discovered in any of his mixtures.

Among the lower orders the English doctor had quite a demoniacal reputation. People believed that he had the power of causing any one to go mad when he chose, or, if mad, of restoring them to sanity. They believed too that he had a cure for every disease; but that, being a malignant fiend, he would not exercise it. Hence none of his poor neighbours ever troubled him. They would as soon have thought of invoking the aid of Satan himself.

However, through good and ill report the English Jew-doctor—for such he was supposed to be—went on his way; getting few patients indeed; but making them pay heavily for his services. No one ever owned to consulting Solomon Esher; the imputation would have been repelled with scorn by any one of his wealthy clients. No one knew his means; but it was generally believed he was immensely rich, though customers seldom or never entered his shop, which kept open for the sale of drugs, seemed but a blind, a mockery. Every evening several seedy-looking men were observed to enter his house one by one, each remaining a little while, and then going away. These men were supposed to be his spies, his agents; for he found it necessary and profitable to know what went on in the world of Parisian life.

Despite the dingy and mean exterior of his house, it was really of considerable extent. In one corner of the little back-room was a strong window. Passing through this, one came to a narrow passage and flight of wooden steps, at the top of which were various rooms of different sizes and aspect; but all well furnished

and lighted. One or two circumstances were noticeable ; and these were the thickness of the walls, the height of the windows, and the strength of the doors. One room was lined throughout with cushions, floor and walls being alike thickly padded. This was for the temporary reception of any unhappy maniac who was to be received in due course at the château in the country ; nominally owned by one Madame Hérault, really by Solomon Esher.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

## INDIAN HEMP.

EDWARD MELHUIISH had written to his new acquaintance Miss de Vere, to inform her of the appointment he had made with Dr. Solomon Esher. At the appointed time the two arrived at the château, and asking for Miss de Vere, they were at once shown up. She met them on the stairs, and Melhuish at once introduced the singular man who accompanied him. He keenly examined the young lady, bestowing on her a scrutiny which was quite painful and embarrassing. They were ushered into the same room where Melhuish had first seen the afflicted girl. It was even worse lighted than on the previous occasion—a small oil-lamp taking the place of the wax-candle. Solomon Esher peered around in the gloom like an old owl, and soon his eye rested on the form of the young girl his patient, who lay half recumbent on the sofa, murmuring to herself.

“Is that my patient?” Solomon asked abruptly.

“Yes,” replied Edward Melhuish. “She appears to be dying.”

Passing sharply towards the young lady, he said,

“And are you Miss de Vere?”

She bowed her head in token of acknowledgment, and Solomon beckoned her away to the window. Melhuish could not hear what was said, but he caught the girl's concluding words: “As you please, as you please.—A thou-

sand francs more ; and as to future arrangements, if it should be unfortunately necessary to place my dear friend where she could be more constantly looked after and attended to, there shall be no difficulty on that ground. I shall not quarrel with your terms."

Melhuish knew by her tones that she spoke scornfully, and despised the meanness and avarice of the miser-doctor. As for Solomon Esher, when he took up the light and advanced to the young lady on the sofa, his eyes gleamed with hopeful expectation. It seemed that now he had indeed struck a rich vein of profit. Placing the lamp on a small table, and drawing it close up to the patient, he began to examine her. She was not asleep, for on the first touch of his hand on her wrist, she half rose, opened her eyes, and stared at the stranger—a vacant, meaningless stare, which seemed very dreadful to Melhuish. He stood talking to Miss de Vere while the doctor was inspecting Maude Luton.

"How has she been, Miss De Vere, since last I saw you?"

"No better, I am sorry to say ; if anything, more incoherent and disordered in her mind."

"Do they know of this in the house?"

"Not exactly. These fits only come on her sometimes,—generally in the evening. Madame knows that she is unwell. I told her that she is suffering from a low fever, and she is satisfied with that. But, alas ! it cannot be long kept from her if this goes on."

Melhuish moved round the table and approached the patient, who, with her eyes wide open, was still muttering and murmuring as though asleep. Solomon Esher was

now feeling her pulse, and with the lamp in his hand, examining her eyes. Again and again he looked at them, held the light to them, and seemed as if desirous of making sure of some peculiarity he observed. Then, just as Edward Melhuish came round to the sofa, he put the lamp down on the table. Letting fall her hand, he rose from his stooping position, and said two words in a low, suppressed tone of voice, but quite distinctly, "*Cannabis Indica*."

"Indian hemp!" cried Edward Melhuish, "surely you would not prescribe Indian Hemp in such a case?"

Solomon started and looked a little surprised.

"I did not say Indian hemp."

"But you said *Cannabis Indica*, and that means Indian hemp, which, as you know, is a powerful, intoxicating, and narcotic drug."

"Ah! I forgot you were medical. No matter; I was only muttering to myself."

"But what about Indian hemp?" urged Melhuish, whose curiosity was now aroused.

"Nothing, nothing, my good young man. I am in the habit of talking to myself,—of speaking aloud."

"Yes; but your spoken thoughts have, I suppose, some connection usually with the business on hand."

"Not necessarily—not necessarily, my good young man. Excuse me—I must speak with the lady now."

But Edward Melhuish was not satisfied. He felt that there was some mystery, something which he could not make out. He was certain that the exclamation *Cannabis Indica* meant something; but what, he could not say.

"Well, sir, what is your opinion of my poor friend's state?" asked Miss De Vere anxiously.

"I think that her mind is seriously deranged. The sooner she is removed from here the better."

She turned very pale under the doctor's searching glance.

"Is she subject to delusions?"

"Yes,—one in particular."

She hesitated ; and there was something very strange in the tone of her voice.

"One in particular !" said Solomon Esher slowly. "And what may that be?"

"She is under the strange delusion that her name is Maude de Vere—that she is myself, in fact."

"She thinks that she is Miss Maude de Vere?" said Solomon, very, very slowly,—*"Miss De Vere the heiress? What a singular fancy! And yet I can well understand her morbid imagination taking that shape. It must be a very enviable thing to be Miss De Vere of Holford Hall."*

There was a singular meaning in the doctor's tone, which did not escape his hearer.

"Holford Hall! Do you know anything of me or my family?" she asked breathlessly.

"I have heard of your father, Stanton de Vere," he replied cautiously.

"What do you know of him? Pray, tell me everything you know or have heard!" she cried eagerly.

"I know nothing that you would care to know,—nothing which I shall tell you."

He spoke derisively ; and instinctively she knew it was of no use to press him further.

"So she fancies she is Miss De Vere?" he went on, still!

regarding her occasionally with a stealthy fox-like glance.

"I hope you never cross her,—never contradict her, or try to persuade her it is otherwise."

"Oh, no; never!"

"Nor does anyone else? Madame here and the other young ladies, they never call her Miss Luton, do they? His searching, keen eyes were on her face; and hers dropped before that keen gaze.

"No," she said; "lately she has seen very little of anyone but myself."

"But when madame, the servants, or any of the other ladies do address her, they humour her whim and call her Miss De Vere?"

"Yes, yes, certainly. But about her health; let us speak of the mode of treatment to be adopted."

It seemed as though she wished to change the subject.

"The treatment! Ah! yes. To keep her quiet. Humour her of course; give nourishing food; and make her as cheerful as possible."

"But what medicine will you prescribe for her?"

"Medicine, eh? She cannot do better than she is now."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Continue the same medicines in the same doses; evidently it has the desired effect."

Again Miss De Vere turned pale under his glance.

"I really wish you would prescribe for her, sir. I scarcely understand you."

"Oh, very well,—as you please. I will send you a prescription, which you must get made up at an English chemist's."



"And you say, sir, that the sooner she is moved from here the better?"

"I do. I can very confidently recommend the charming country-house of Madame Hérault, distant from here some eight miles. I myself visit there every day. I take a great interest in the establishment. It is expensive, but I will guarantee the very best treatment. Every luxury and enjoyment is there provided; and if it be possible to cure, a cure will be effected—if not, the life of the afflicted one will be made perfectly happy. In the present case—as you say money is no object—if this young lady were removed there and did not recover, she would lead a charmingly happy life; happy in her delusion that she was Miss De Vere, which no one would ever seek to dissipate. Indeed she might live and die fancying she was the heiress of Holford Hall."

"It would not be convenient to move her until the quarter was up. Nor could it be done without the consent of her friends. They must be communicated with of course."

"The young lady is not likely to get worse rapidly." Solomon Esher went on. "Under the present treatment she will remain about the same for a month or two probably. Still the sooner she was under skilful treatment and constant surveillance, the better for herself, and chance of recovery."

"I will see to it at the earliest possible moment," she replied. "I will communicate with her friends; and if they consent, I will inform Madame Dumonney that we shall return to England in a couple of months' time—at the end of the quarter, in fact. We can then leave here without

attracting attention, take up our quarters at an hotel in Paris, whence my unfortunate friend can be moved to this establishment, without any body being aware of it except ourselves."

Solomon Esher, knowing what he knew, or thought he knew, could not help admiring the sound sense and prudence of this plan. "This girl," he said to himself, "young as she is, has an admirable head. She would make an excellent accomplice in a conspiracy."

Miss De Vere went to her desk, and producing therefrom some bank-notes, gave him four, of ten pounds each. He examined each one separately.

"These are indorsed with the name of David Luton, Cumberford—a relation of the young lady, I suppose?"

She coloured up under his penetrating gaze; but answered,

"Yes,—her cousin. I had them from her."

Solomon Esher took his leave then, promising to call again in the course of a week. "That last was a lie, if ever a lie was told by woman's lips. Ah! Yes, I begin to see light through the haze. Miss de Vere and Miss Luton,—Miss Luton and Miss de Vere—a curious complication, a strange affair; but out of it there's lots of money to be made, or my name's not Solomon Esher."

Maude de Vere left them at the head of the stairs to find their own way down, and herself went back to the little room. Solomon Esher walking across the hall by the side of Melhuish suddenly stopped, and saying, "Wait a moment,—I want to speak to madame," went up to a servant he there saw, and expressed his wish. Melhuish, who was ill-tempered and sulky, partly because he thought there

was some mystery which he could not fathom, partly because he thought Miss de Vere had treated him rather cavalierly, waited impatiently for his companion, intending to try and see if he could get anything out of him. Solomon Esher did not keep him waiting long. He came out from the room to which he had been shown in, with a quick, shuffling, shambling gait, his head bent down. As they passed out together and entered the hired vehicle which had brought them, Melhuish noticed that his companion was chuckling with delight.

"What is it amuses you, doctor?" he asked.

"Oh dear, my young friend, it is a strange world we live in—a very strange world. Just now I went back to speak just a few words to Madame Dumonney, and what do you think I discovered?"

"I have not the least idea. Anything bearing on the present case?" the other asked eagerly.

"Bear on the present case! I should think it did, and no mistake. O, Solomon Esher, you're a lucky fellow, a cute fellow, and you've done a good stroke of business this day! Only to think of it, why it's enough to take one's breath away! And all so plain and simple too. Why, *she'll do it*, to a certainty."

"Do it!—do what? What on earth are you talking about? are you too going mad?"

"Going mad! Me—ha, ha, ha! he, he, he!—eh? go mad! What am I talking of?"

"Yes, yes, you old fool,—what are you talking of, and what have you discovered?" he said angrily.

"Ho, ho, ho! old fool, eh? You're polite, young man; but I forgive you. What have I discovered!—ah! if you

only knew. It's glorious! simple as milk; a splendid idea! By Jove! she's a magnificent girl, that Miss de Vere, ain't she? a clever girl—knows what she's about."

"What the devil are you talking of! Look here, Mr. Solomon Esher: I recommended you to the young lady; and if you play any tricks, if you ain't open and fair, if you don't tell me everything, I will withdraw the recommendation, and you'll lose a lucrative patient. So now just tell me straight out what you've discovered, and what this is all about. What the deuce do you keep on chuckling and rubbing your hands together for?"

"Well, Mr. Edward Melhuish, I shan't tell you; and as to your withdrawing your recommendation, as you call it, you can't do it; it's too late."

"Too late!—how do you mean? Miss de Vere is a friend of mine, and will take my advice."

"Miss de Vere a friend of yours—ho, ho, ho!—and will take your advice! he, he, he! Capital! first rate! O, if you only knew what I know!"

"Look here, Mr. Solomon Esher; if you have any of your infernal nonsense with me, if you laugh and grin at me, I'm d—d if I don't chuck you out of the carriage-window into the road!"

Mr. Solomon Esher's merriment suddenly ceased. Probably he had no wish to provoke his countryman further, who certainly looked able and willing to fulfil his threat.

"My good young friend," he said, "I have no wish whatever to quarrel with you. Excuse my merriment, I always am cheerful when anything pleases me; and to-day, within the last hour I have been very much pleased.

You are angry because I will not give you the benefit of my brains—will not tell you what I have discovered which is likely to be advantageous to me. If you choose to be angry you must be so. I resolutely decline to take you into my confidence, or to tell you anything on the subject we have been speaking about. You go your way; I will go mine. If you can persuade the heiress to consent, marry her by all means; then there would be one share of her fortune which you might enjoy as her husband, one for herself, and the remaining third for me. You observe I am moderate; I content myself with a third when I might have a clear half."

"A third of her fortune!—you have a third of Miss de Vere's fortune! Are you mad?"

"Not a bit of it, my friend; or if I am mad, it's an extremely sensible piece of madness, in a pecuniary point of view."

Edward Melhuish ground his teeth with impotent rage. He was quite powerless, and was well aware that his brute strength was no match for the cunning and astuteness of Solomon Esher.

Now that events in Paris, concerning the personages in our story are fairly in train, and everything progressing satisfactorily towards the inevitable denouement, we will so leave them, and transport ourselves back to England.

The reader can, if he or she pleases, exercise his ingenuity, by attempting to unravel the skein, which seemed so easy to the subtle brain of the unscrupulous English Jew-doctor.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## DAVID HEARS BAD NEWS.

DAVID LUTON was sitting alone at the breakfast-table. It was half-past nine, and for years he had never been in the house a minute after the clock struck,—always away on his rounds the moment he had swallowed his coffee and roll. He had before him a letter on thin foreign paper, which ever and anon he took up and read and re-read with rueful desponding countenance. On this morning he felt no heart for his work. "Poor Maude, poor Maude!" he murmured. "What a terrible fate! God help me; I feel like a child. I could cry. I am crying!" And as this conviction forced itself on the honest-hearted fellow, tears coursed down his cheeks. "I cannot go my rounds to-day. I won't try. I dare not trust myself. My hand shakes so, I couldn't lance a whitlow. I will go into the surgery and make up some medicine."

With the hope of drowning his wretched thoughts, David Luton went into the little room dignified by the name of Surgery, and worked away with a will at pestle and mortar, as though for dear life. Eleven o'clock struck, and he came back into the breakfast-room. He seated himself in the little easy-chair by the fireplace, and again read the letter through from beginning to end. "Poor Maude, poor Maude! Heaven knows this blow has fallen

heavily. I know not what to do,—what to think. I wish Davenport was here.”

Ten minutes had not elapsed before, as if in answer to his wish, a dog-cart drove up to the door, and therefrom descended Sydney Davenport, who having come from town by an early train, had driven over from the station. David Luton, strange to say, did not go out to meet him. He was too much prostrated by the intelligence the letter had brought him.

“Well, David, how are you?” said Davenport, shaking hands with him. “You did not expect me?”

“No, indeed; but I am very glad you have come. I am in great trouble. I have this morning received a letter from Miss De Vere!”

“And I yesterday received one from Maude Luton. It is that which brought me down. I fear that there is something wrong. She must be ill, or—or— David, I hate to say the word; but it must be said.”

“Yes, yes, I know,—she is mad, quite insane; and I fear hopelessly. This letter tells me all about it.”

Davenport was greatly shocked at this intelligence. The letter he had received was of an extraordinary nature. In the first place, it was edged with the deepest black border he had ever seen. Then it was wild and incoherent in the extreme, and wound up by saying that the writer was now Maude De Vere,—no longer Maude Luton. Maude Luton was dead, and she was heiress of Holford Hall. Now this might be a freak on her part, though a practical joke of the kind was very unlike Maude Luton. Still Sydney hoped against hope, till, on arriving at Cumberford, he heard the sad news that his beautiful Maude was mad.

"I will read you Miss De Vere's letter, and then you can judge for yourself," he said. "It is a very proper, kind letter. She seems to take her friend's affliction very deeply to heart."

Thus ran the letter—

"DEAR MR. LUTON,—It is with a heavy heart I take up my pen to write to you. I have before written respecting our dear Maude's health, but then I dared not say all I feared. Now, however, I must speak plainly. I have had the best physicians in Paris to see her, and they are unanimous that her mind is affected—in plain words, that at the present moment she is insane. It commenced, they say, with hysterical mania, and she has now merged into a state of imbecility, with strange delusions; the principal one of which is that she is heiress of Holford Hall—that she is Maude De Vere, and not Maude Luton. Any contradiction makes her much worse—as does the mention of the name of any one she has known in England. I grieve to say it, but in her ravings she manifests the utmost dislike to you, and declares that you are conspiring against her in conjunction with Mr. Hopton and Mr. Davenport. I asked the doctors if it would be well for you to come over to see her. They replied that it would be absolutely fatal to her recovery, destroy the last chance. They think that by skilful treatment, perfect quiet, and the watchful eye of a physician constantly on her, her warped and distorted mind may be gradually improved and reason restored. But any excitement—seeing old faces, or even hearing familiar names—might, and probably would bring on a state of furious mania. There is a large mansion about twelve miles from Paris, presided over by a most



- skilful physician—a man who has made marvellous cures among the insane. This place is beautifully situated and admirably conducted. The patients have every possible luxury provided, and all sorts of suitable amusements. Now I have arranged about the terms; and if you are agreeable I, as her friend,—a rich friend,—claim the poor right of being allowed to pay. You know Mr. Luton, I can well afford it; and I assure you I would this moment resign half my fortune to restore dear Maude to her reason. Do not attempt to communicate with her on any account. A gentleman, a medical man, nephew to the physician to the British Embassy, is coming over to England in a few days; and he has kindly promised to call on you and explain anything which I have omitted to do, or am incapable of doing. I cannot say any more now. I know you will join me in prayers for her recovery.—Believe me, my dear sir, yours very faithfully,  
“MAUDE DE VERE.”

“That is a very plain, straightforward, and proper letter, is it not?” said David Luton.

“It is; but I should never have thought that Miss De Vere had written it. I could not have given her credit for so much. It is so well arranged and terse—saying everything that should be said and nothing more. Very unlike Maude De Vere, and—Ah! let me look!”

David handed him the letter.

“Why, this is Maude Luton’s handwriting!”

“Oh no,” said David with a sigh; “they write a hand very much alike. I have noticed it before!”

“Very much alike. Why, I could have sworn this was Maude Luton’s hand.”

"No, no; I wish it were her handwriting, poor girl. Would to heaven she could write so sensible a letter!"

"True," said Davenport sadly; "This one she wrote to me is more in consonance with her unhappy state."

"What is to be done?" asked David helplessly.

"Nothing," replied his friend, after deliberating for some little time. "Nothing at present, at all events."

"But it seems so cruel and heartless to leave the poor girl to her fate. I should like to go over and see her for myself; but then it seems the Paris doctors say that would be absolutely fatal. I don't know what to do—I wish you would tell me, Sydney."

"My dear old David, we must wait—wait until this gentleman comes over of whom Miss de Vere speaks. He will doubtless be able to give us further particulars."

And so, lacking any better course, it was settled. They had not long to wait in suspense; for within a week from the day when they had each received a letter, Mr. Edward Melhuish presented himself. David Luton, when he learned who he was, received him with sad hospitality; and after offering some refreshment, at once inquired eagerly after his cousin.

"I am very sorry I cannot give you a good report sir," he said. "She is much the same,—no better, no worse."

"When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday morning before leaving."

"You have seen her often and conversed with her?"

"I have seen her often, but not conversed with her. I think in her present state a conversation would be

impossible. Miss de Vere alone seems to have any power over her. Usually she is sunk in a dream-like apathy—lying as if half asleep, murmuring to herself. The only strongly-fixed idea she seems to have, is that she is Miss de Vere. On that subject her friend informs me she is sometimes even violent. And she has been seen by eminent men in Paris; all of whom are of the same opinion, that she is deranged—undoubtedly so.”

“And do they recommend her removal to an establishment especially devoted to the treatment of mental diseases?”

“All seem to think that it is her only chance.”

Sydney Davenport presently asked a few questions, and then both relinquished the subject, each sadly convinced that poor Maude Luton was as bad as it was possible to be. Edward Melhuish having performed his mission, took his departure, leaving Davenport and David Luton in a state of deep apprehension. Said the former to himself with bitter grief—

“I never knew it till now, when I became aware of the great misfortune which has befallen her; but I loved that girl,—I know I admired her. Now that it appears that she is lost to me and the world, I know that I loved her.”

After thinking over the matter for two or three days, David sat down and wrote a letter to Maude de Vere. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude for her kindness to his unfortunate cousin, agreed with all she said in her letter, and finally gave his consent, as her only surviving relative, for her to be removed to the establishment of which she spoke. But he insisted on paying at least a share of the

expenses which might be incurred, and enclosed for that purpose a draft for a hundred pounds. The recipient of this letter, when she read it, wept and sobbed as though her heart would break. She walked up and down her chamber in convulsive agitation, which ever and anon broke from her in disjointed sentences: "I cannot do it—I cannot—I cannot. It is too cruel, dear David—so good and kind!" Then she threw herself on the bed and wept bitterly. Presently she grew composed, and seemingly conquered the emotion which possessed her, and set to work to arrange for the quiet removal of her unfortunate friend.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE HEIRESS ASSERTS HER RIGHTS.

ANOTHER six months had passed. David Luton had heard several times from Miss de Vere. She reported that his cousin since her removal to the establishment of Madame Hérault had become calmer. The doctors, however, did not give much hope of her recovery—for some time at least—and still strictly forbade any excitement.

One afternoon a lady entered the office of Mr. Cardale the lawyer and asked to see him. On being asked her name, she gave her card, "Miss De Vere." So soon as the old lawyer knew who his visitor was, he hurried out to receive her, and ushered her respectfully into his inner room.

"My dear young lady, my charming ward, I am delighted to see you; but I must say this is an unexpected pleasure."

"I wrote to you to say I should shortly be in London and would call upon you."

"Yes, yes; but I gathered from your letter that it might not be for weeks yet. But will you not throw off your veil and allow me a glimpse of your charming face?"

"Certainly," she said laughing; and doing as he asked, stood smiling before him.

"Dear me, young lady, how you have improved since last I saw you! You look older, not so childish; your figure too looks taller and more developed. Decidedly you have improved. Your eyes too are lighter,—not so dark and sleepy-looking (excuse me for speaking so plainly) as when you were here before. Certainly your twelve-months' sojourn abroad has wonderfully improved you. By-the-way, how old are you now?"

She began to speak; then abruptly checked herself, coughed, coloured up, and replied, "Nearly eighteen, sir."

"Dear me, dear me! When you were here last I looked on you as a mere school-girl. Now I suppose I must accustom myself to regard you as a young woman."

"If you please, Mr. Cardale," she replied gently, "I am no longer a child. Indeed I have come to you on business. I wish to accustom myself to business, and habituate myself to the command and use of money."

Miss De Vere drew her chair up to the lawyer's table, covered as it was with papers and writing-materials, and taking a pen and sheet of paper, she prepared herself to write.

"Now," she said, "I will try and deal with you methodically, so that you may see I am in earnest in my desire to accustom myself to the management of my affairs."

Mr. Cardale gazed at his fair young client, surprise struggling with perplexity in his expression, the change of manner and character seemed so great. Before, he had found great difficulty in getting his ward to attend to the most trivial

matters, or even to listen to him when he talked about business. She used to hate the name of it ; and now she declared she wished to familiarise herself with all its details. Not a very amusing study at any time. Before, too, he had seen and talked to a frivolous school-girl—rather weak-minded, if anything. Now he found himself confronted by a woman—a beautiful young lady certainly, but one who spoke and looked as though she were capable of entering into her own affairs, and meant to do so.

Of course he could, had it pleased him, have refused to enter into her affairs or give any information ; for Miss De Vere was a minor, and he her legally-appointed guardian. But he had no intention of so acting. The management of the estates and the law-business connected therewith brought him in a good sum yearly. He was well off besides, and was disposed to do his best for the interests of the orphan-heiress. So after wondering a little in a quiet sort of way at the change which had taken place in his ward, he assented freely.

“ If such is your wish, Miss De Vere, I shall be happy to assist you, and give any information I can.”

“ Very well, then,” she said. “ Now first about my income—the income of the estates. What is the net amount ?”

After calculating mentally for a minute or so, he replied—

“ I think I may safely say that the net income at present exceeds fifteen thousand pounds per annum ; but some of the property is improving ; and there is, besides, a sum of seventy-two thousand pounds invested in the Funds, also a balance of two or three thousand at the banker’s. So I

do not think, young lady, you need be in any alarm about money-matters."

"Oh, dear, no," she said smilingly; "I am in no alarm; but I wished to know. You see, Mr. Cardale," she added seriously, "I believe in the dictum that 'property has its duties as well as its rights.'"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lawyer, throwing up his hands; "I had no idea that you were a political economist."

"Nor am I," she said gravely; "but I feel the responsibility of being the possessor of such wealth; and honestly wish to do my duty, to enjoy the advantages and luxuries which it places in my power, and yet not to forget others. I wish, in fact, to hold it through life as you do at the present moment, in trust."

The lawyer, whose thoughts were all of the world, worldly, said to himself.

"The sly demure young minx is thinking already of the children, heirs to the estate."

Maude went on, after writing a little on a sheet of letter-paper before her.

"The interest on seventy-two thousand pounds in the Three-and-a-half per Cents is two thousand five hundred and twenty pounds. This sum added to the rental of the estates, makes up a total income of seventeen thousand five hundred and twenty pounds."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the old lawyer; "why, I did not imagine you knew what the 'Funds' were, to say nothing of the rate of interest."

"Ah! you see, Mr. Cardale, I have lately been turning my attention to this sort of thing. If I am wrong, please correct me."



"Wrong!" he exclaimed. "You are right—wonderfully correct, alarmingly so—almost. Really it seems so strange, I feel inclined to rub my eyes, and ask—Is it indeed Miss De Vere to whom I am talking?"

A momentary flush came to the young lady's face; but she went on with perfect equanimity and self-possession.

"Now I would propose, Mr. Cardale, to leave fifty thousand pounds in the Funds; the interest thereof added to the rental, would make sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds. Of this I would put by each year one-third; that is to say, five thousand five hundred and eighty pounds nearly. The remaining two-thirds I should wish to spend in improving the estate and otherwise. The thirty-two thousand pounds taken from that invested in the Funds I should like to be placed at my disposal, as also every year two-thirds of the net income—that is to say, eleven thousand one hundred and sixty pounds or thereabouts."

Mr. Cardale stood absolutely aghast at the cool deliberate way in which his ward talked of such enormous sums. Her figures were so perfectly correct too—her manner as calm as though she had been talking of purchasing a dress or article of jewellery.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "Miss De Vere, do you know of what you are talking? Thirty-two thousand pounds, and more than eleven thousand a-year to be placed at your disposal!"

"Certainly," she replied quietly, "I do not see that there is anything astonishing in it. I think that if I put by a third of my income, and leave fifty thousand pounds

in the funds, I shall be acting with quite sufficient prudence."

"But, my dear young lady, what do you propose to do with such large sums of money? How can you possibly expend eleven thousand a-year?"

"How? Why in improving the estate, beautifying the park and hall, and by judicious charity. Of course, Mr. Cardale, I shall be in constant need of your advice and assistance in all my plans; and I am sure I can depend on receiving them."

"You can, indeed, Miss De Vere. It will be at once my pleasure and duty. As to the proposal you have just made me, as your guardian, I am bound to say it requires consideration. I admit that what you say is reasonable enough,—that the estates are capable of great improvement by judiciously applying capital."

"Then to neglect so to improve would be a grave fault, Mr. Cardale," she said quickly.

"Yes, I grant that; but——"

"But what? I can, however, guess your objection. You would say that it was unusual, unprecedented, for a young lady, a minor, to undertake even the least management of her own affairs. To that I reply: some day—in a few years—I shall have not part, but absolute control over the whole of these estates. Now, as I am determined to take the management in my own hands some day, it will surely be better for me to accustom myself thereto under your tuition, with your aid, than to have to make a sudden plunge when I attain my majority. You may be assured, Mr. Cardale, that I am desirous of always retaining you as my adviser. What then can be better than that we now

accustom ourselves to work together? I, with your aid and advice, will dispose of the two-thirds of the income; while you on your part do the best you can with the fifty thousand in the Funds, and the five thousand five hundred pounds odd I have resolved to set aside."

Mr. Cardale listened quietly to what she urged in calm sweet tones, which, however, were full of decision. The result was that the old lawyer was quite brought over to her views. He did not acknowledge as much at once, however, but, for dignity's sake, repeated that the matter required consideration. Maude De Vere gracefully acquiesced, and cordially shaking hands with her guardian, prepared to take her departure. While standing, and about to leave, she suddenly said:—

"Oh, by the bye, Mr. Cardale, you may as well give instructions that my draft on the banker's be honoured. I understood you, I think, to say there was a trifling balance there of some two thousand pounds?"

A trifling balance of two thousand pounds! The words fell strangely on his ears from the lips of this young girl. True, two thousand pounds was a trifling sum, considering the value of the property; but what struck him as so remarkable was the calm and quiet manner in which she spoke of money, as though she had been in the habit of dealing with large sums for years, whereas the fact was, until the last year she had been supplied with all she wanted without the necessity of cash payments; and even lately he had only sent her fifty or a hundred pounds at a time as she needed it. However, he assented to her wishes in this respect, and she took her departure, leaving him in a state of considerable perplexity and amazement.

In a week's time she called again, by appointment. She had been staying in London at a West-end hotel, attended only by a French waiting-maid; and after finally arranging business affairs with her guardian, was going down to the Hall to take possession there as mistress.

"I have thought over what you said when last here, Miss De Vere," he commenced, after the usual salutations had passed, "and am inclined to fall in with your views."

"Thank you," she said, passively bowing her head. "I thought you would. There is one subject on which I forgot to speak to you, Mr. Cardale," she went on. "You are aware that I went to the establishment of Madame Dumonney in company of a very dear friend, Miss Maude Luton."

He bowed his head assentingly.

"A terrible misfortune has befallen her. Her mind has become disordered—only temporarily, it is hoped. However, she has been removed to a place kept by one Madame Hérault, where she will have the benefit of the very best medical skill. This establishment is expensive; and, besides, I wish her to enjoy every possible comfort, appliance, and luxury. If necessary, I would wish her to be visited daily by the most celebrated physicians, regardless of expense. In order that this may be carried out, I am desirous that a thousand pounds shall be paid over annually for her use."

"A thousand pounds is a large sum."

"Not in such a case as this is. A thousand pounds is nothing in comparison with the calamity which has be-

fallen her. At all events, I am quite decided on this subject. I am determined that Maude Luton shall have the best of everything,—medical advice, home comforts, and attention."

Miss de Vere gained her point without opposition ; and Mr. Cardale promised he would at once arrange that one thousand a year should be paid, quarterly, for the benefit of Miss Maude Luton.

"And now about other business. To-morrow I purpose going down to the Hall, where I shall reside until I am of age. I shall receive very little company myself ; but intend to inaugurate my coming to reside amongst them by a *fête* to the tenantry and poor people. I shall keep open house for a week ; and see that abundant food, wine, and all things necessary, are constantly on the table. Furthermore, in the outhouses and barns, tables shall be spread constantly for all labourers and their families on the estate. At the expiration of the week I shall at once proceed to inspect the condition of the farms, and decide, in company with Mr. Brown, the steward, what improvements are necessary. Then I will come up to town, and consult you on the matter of improvements and alterations immediately about the Hall and grounds. I shall instruct the steward to see about it at once."

Her guardian assented to this, and Miss de Vere went on :

"About money, I think it would be convenient to open an account at a bank in London with a branch in the market-town. The London and County Bank fulfils this condition, and I would suggest that the thirty-two thousand pounds should be paid in to my credit. Then I can draw on the branch bank or on London as I please."

All this was perfectly correct, and caused still greater astonishment to the lawyer, by the knowledge of business it proved she possessed.

"Assuredly," he thought, "if, as she says, she means to make business affairs her study, she will very quickly learn everything, and be capable of managing the estate unaided." This last thought was not without a little self-interested pang. She would shortly be able to do without him !

However, he made no objection ; and everything being duly settled as she wished, Miss de Vere took her leave of him ; and on the following afternoon she arrived at Holford Hall, where she was duly hailed as mistress.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## DAVID SEES THE MISTRESS OF HOLFORD HALL.

A SURPRISE awaited the young heiress. She heard the next day that a neighbouring estate, known as Burcot Manor, had been purchased by a gentleman from the West of England, who was shortly coming to reside there. On inquiring as to who this gentleman might be, great was her astonishment when she learned it was Sydney Davenport.

Red and pale she grew by turns ; her fine eyes sparkled with excitement—pleasure or anger, it was impossible to say which ; and on receiving the intelligence she at once returned home, and retired to her little boudoir, to which there was only access by the verandah.

First she wrote a note, sealed it, and despatched it by a mounted groom. Then she commenced another one, but could not apparently end it to her satisfaction. Once, twice, and again she tore up the unfinished note, and commenced again. At last she rose, and pettishly tearing up her last attempt, said half-aloud, "I can't write to him now. It must be done—it shall be done ; but I must wait a little longer, and feel myself better established in my new position."

That afternoon David Luton received a note, brought over by a messenger from Holford Hall.

DEAR MR. LUTON.—I returned home yesterday, and

propose to reside here permanently. I am very anxious to see you for many reasons, especially to talk over the sad misfortune which has befallen my dear friend, your cousin, Maude Luton. I shall be at home every evening, and hope to see you very soon. I do not feel disposed to come over to Cumberford to visit you; it would only awaken painful memories of poor Maude. By the last accounts, she was much the same,—not worse, but, alas! I fear also not better.—Yours very faithfully,

MAUDE DE VERE."

"I will go over at once,—this very evening," said David after he had read the letter.

And within an hour he was on the road. He had, however, many patients to call upon; and in order to do so made a long *detour*. This brought it to evening; and just as daylight was merging into twilight he rode into the stable-yard of the Hall.

In answer to his inquiry as to whether Miss de Vere was within, he was answered in the affirmative, and at once shown into the drawing-room.

He waited for fully a quarter of an hour, and then began to wonder what detained her, she was usually so very prompt. After turning over the books on the table he rose and looked out of the window. He had not been thus occupied many moments when he heard the rustling of a silk dress, and turning, saw a young lady advancing from the door. David Luton gave quite a violent start, and then stared aghast.

"You look surprised, Mr. Luton!" she said. "Am I then so much altered?"

Again he started as her voice fell on his ear—low, a



little tremulous, and certainly husky, as though she had a cold.

"I beg your pardon, Miss de Vere," he said falteringly, "but—but I scarcely know what to say. You quite startled me."

"Ah ! yes," she said ; I remind you of your unfortunate cousin. You notice the likeness between us. Every one does so."

"That is indeed the fact," he replied, recovering himself. "For a moment I was quite startled by the likeness ; now, however, I see the difference. You dress your hair differently ; your eyebrows are more clearly marked. I beg your pardon, really."

"Pray, don't, Mr. Luton. Take a seat. I have been so anxious to see you ; and now I want to talk to you about poor Maude."

"Ah ! yes. I fear you have no good news."

"There is hope, Mr. Luton. I saw her a little more than a fortnight ago. She was quiet and apparently happy. And but for her extraordinary delusion, the one monomania that clings to her so persistently, I should say she is better. Unfortunately I happened to forget myself for a moment, and called her Maude Luton. On that she jumped up, and fell into quite a passion. I pacified her as best I could, and left her quiet and resigned enough. But this little incident convinced me that the disease was in full force. If, however, she could divest herself of the idea that she is heiress of Holford Hall, I am sure the rest would be easy. I would willingly humour her so far as even to let her assume my name, and live here as the owner ; but besides the impossibility of such a thing, the

doctors say it would only make her worse, confirm her in her singular delusion."

"You are right, Miss de Vere,—unquestionably right. I can only express my great gratitude for all your kindness to my cousin."

"I am sure I wish I could have done more for her, poor girl! It makes my heart bleed to think of it."

"I suppose," he asked, "it would not be judicious for me to see her?"

"I fear not; but in the course of a week or two the English doctor who attended her, and has now undertaken the care of her case, is coming to see me and consult about her. You can talk with him and get his view of the case."

"Do you mean Mr. Edward Melhuish? I have seen him as you know."

"No; I am speaking of a very clever man, who has a great reputation in Paris. His name is Dr. Solomon Esher. He is a most eccentric personage—miserly, unpleasant, but beyond all question endowed both with skill and experience."

"He will be here shortly, I hope. I am most anxious to hear from professional lips a history of the case."

They talked for some time; and gradually David Luton seemed to grow accustomed to the great change he observed in the heiress.

"I hear that Mr. Davenport is coming to live in the neighbourhood," she said with apparent carelessness, but her eyes all the while acutely watching David's face.

"Ah, yes! I forgot to tell you about it. He has bought Burcot Manor, and intends to reside here. He will be a great acquisition, as he is already well-liked. Already he

has been appointed a magistrate, and it is not unlikely that he may be returned to Parliament for our borough next election. You see he has purchased the fox-hounds, and is going to keep them on at his own expense. This makes him very popular among the country gentlemen and farmers."

"When will he come to reside here?" she asked.

"Why, he may come at any moment. The old Manor-House is in excellent condition, and he bought it furnished. He is coming to Cumberford next Wednesday, but not to stop, as he has business which will occupy a great deal of time down at his father's place. He is now independent of the old gentleman, as he has inherited some property from an uncle; but he is an excellent son, and spares no trouble in the management of his father's estates. He will be a wealthy landed proprietor some day. After his father's death, no doubt his income will amount to seven thousand a-year; not equal to yours, Miss de Vere, but still, in the estimation of us poor hard-working men, a vast sum."

Strangely enough Miss de Vere seemed annoyed at hearing of Sydney Davenport's good fortune. Her colour came and went, as David Luton went on to say:

"I understand from his letter to me that one great object in his present visit is to see you. He took a great interest in poor Maude, and I know wishes to hear full particulars of her from yourself."

"When does he come?" Miss de Vere asked.

"On Wednesday next."

"And how long does he stay in the neighbourhood?"

"Only two or three days, at the outside."

"How extremely unfortunate!" said the heiress, lan-

guidly. "I am compelled to go to London on Tuesday and shall be absent at least four days."

"It is indeed unfortunate," David said innocently. "I know Sydney will be deeply disappointed. You have no idea how he has fretted about my unhappy cousin. Do you know I had a very strong idea one time that he was in love with her?"

Why that sudden flush of colour which rose at the words, crimsoning the fair skin of Miss de Vere from her brow to her cheek? Why the trembling excitement with which she rose, and somewhat abruptly put an end to the interview? And why when she was alone did she, after a few turns up and down the room, throw herself on an ottoman and bury her burning face in the soft cushions? Could it be that Maude de Vere loved Sydney Davenport, and now heard for the first time that his love was bestowed elsewhere?

It might have been so; and yet it was strange, if such were the case, that the expression of her face was not altogether one of pain. Her eyes shone with unwonted fire; her blood seemed to throb faster through her veins; and when the first hot blush which his words had called up died away, there remained a heightened colour, a hectic flush. Her look, her demeanour seemed to indicate mixed emotions; but above all, there struggled to the surface hope and strong determination.

"In time, in time!" she muttered. "I cannot see him as yet. But I will nerve myself for the task, and will conquer. Surely if he loved Maude Luton he *must love* Maude de Vere!"

Strange reasoning truly this!

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## MR. MELHUISH MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

Now back to Paris—to crafty old Solomon Esher, and love-stricken, headstrong, somewhat unscrupulous, and by no means remarkably acute, Edward Melhuish.

With Maude the unfortunate inmate of a first-class mad-house, we have at present nothing to do.

Mr. Edward Melhuish when last we saw him in Paris, had just become alive to the fact that old Solomon Esher had outwitted him—at least in this way, that though he, Melhuish, had introduced him to the affair, Solomon had discovered a secret, a valuable secret, and refused to impart it. This conduct Mr. Melhuish considered unfair, even treacherous, and resolved if possible to discover for himself the secret which had given the old doctor such delight. He was not without cunning and address, and at once set himself to work to ferret out the knowledge he sought. But in Solomon Esher he had an astuter intellect to deal with than his own. In vain he hung about him, and sought to draw him out by apparently careless remarks. The old fellow would only chuckle in a low tone, and hold his tongue. He saw through Mr. Melhuish's design, and one evening told him so plainly.

"My good young friend," he said, "I have a great

respect for you—the very greatest, in fact. I like you as a man, and as a countryman in a foreign land. But I have no intention whatever to let you into my secrets. I have already told you too much perhaps in saying that Miss de Vere would reward me for my humble services with a third of her fortune. You are ambitious to share the other two-thirds with her; a very laudable ambition *eh?* Marry her then—that is my advice.”

Edward Melhuish muttered some surly answer—deeply annoyed that he should be foiled, and his failure be discovered by the old man. As he walked home that night, he said to himself—

“Marry her! Ah, that is all very well. But I am not so sure of my power. Now, could I but find out this secret, it would give me a strong hold upon her. I must—I will discover it.”

But though he thus confidently expressed his intention of succeeding, it was a very different matter in practice; and at last he was almost on the point of giving it up as hopeless, when accident befriended him.

One evening he called upon Solomon, and found him writing. When Melhuish entered, the old man immediately gathered up the papers and put them into his desk; one little piece, however, fluttered away and fell on the floor. His visitor noticed it, and, strangely enough felt a strong desire to peruse it. But to pick it up and possess himself of it under the keen eyes of Solomon Esher was impossible.

Just at that time, however, there was heard a great commotion outside the little shop, and a man was carried in covered with blood. He had been wounded in a street-

fight, in which bludgeons and knives were freely used. His companions, fierce men in blouses, pushed in with him in considerable numbers, and the old doctor dared not refuse surgical assistance. He went out into the front-shop, Melhuish following him. But the latter contrived to pick up the piece of paper, and secret it about him. Then he wished Solomon good-night, leaving him to his patient and the rough men his companions, and made the best of his way home.

He read the paper fight through; and to say that he looked astonished would not express it. He looked absolutely aghast as he realised the meaning of the sentences there written. It was divided into numbered paragraphs and headed, "*Summary of the state of affairs in the De Vere and Luton case.*" Then came paragraphs 1, 2; 3, 4, 5, 6; making up altogether a most startling statement.

"It can't be true," said Melhuish, rising and pacing up and down his apartment. "It is impossible; so young, so beautiful, so fascinating, and yet such a—I know not what to say. And yet old Solomon writes positively enough; and he is not one to take up an idea lightly. Still I cannot conceive it. No girl could be capable of such things—unless she were mad. By Jove, I would rather believe they were both mad."

But on consideration and calm thought Edward Melhuish's opinion gradually changed, and coincided with that of the crafty old doctor. Many little circumstances came back to his memory now, which seemed to favour Solomon Esher's, at first sight, wild and improbable statement of facts.

"By heavens! he is right," exclaimed Edward Melhuish

at last. "I have discovered the secret. She is in my power—mine, absolutely. She dare not refuse me. I will go over to England and make my own terms."

He then sat down and wrote out two fair copies of the document which had enlightened him.

The next morning he called upon Solomon Esher and informed him abruptly that he had succeeded.

"Succeeded? Succeeded in what?" asked the old man.

"Why, I have found out that which you refused to tell me."

"*You?* Nonsense."

The words were spoken with contemptuous indifference, which galled Melhuish.

"Nonsense, eh? We shall see. I am going to England at once. I wonder *will* Miss *De Vere* think it nonsense. Adieu, my friend."

The words were spoken slowly and with an emphasis which the old quack could not misunderstand. His countenance fell suddenly, and he called after the young man, but in vain.

"Ah! I fear he has indeed discovered something. The way he pronounced the name was enough. Let me see; I must think, think, think." And leaning his head on his hand, he remained some minutes buried in thought. Then he brought out his desk; and, as was his invariable custom, wrote down the conclusion he had come to. That instant a flash of light illumined his mind.

"Ah!" he cried, "it is true. He has discovered all, and through my accursed carelessness. I was writing down a statement; and when I hurriedly put the papers away



yesterday I dropped one. Thief that he is, he picked it up and read everything plainly stated. Fool, dolt that I was. Now .what is to be done. England? No; I will wait the result of his expedition. He is green and reckless, and will very likely be utterly foiled by that splendid girl. Yes, I will wait, wait, wait."

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE SCHEMER IS FOILED.

MR. EDWARD MELHUISH fulfilled his intention ; and starting at once, arrived in London on the same night.

Here he put up at an hotel, and remained some few days, making various inquiries, and collecting his thoughts for a plan of action.

Shortly after, Maude De Vere, seated at her breakfast-table in her little boudoir, received the morning's letters. There was one from Mr. Cardale ; another, which she opened first and in haste ; and a third, which she tossed on one side, not recognising the hand. The first was from Mr. Sydney Davenport, and expressed in a few words his sorrow that he had missed seeing her, and a hope that as they were to be neighbours in the country they would be friends. Then it went on to inquire about the welfare of "poor Maude Luton," in whom he obviously felt a deep interest.

"Maude Luton ! Maude Luton !" murmured Miss De Vere ; "nothing but Maude Luton. Ah, well, we will alter all that in good time."

And as she spoke, there came on her face a confident smile.

Next she opened the letter of Mr. Cardale. It was to the effect that a person name Edward Melhuish had been there inquiring about her.

"Audacious fellow!" she cried angrily. "How dare he go prying into my affairs?"

The third letter, however, produced the most marked effect of all. It was from Melhuish himself. As she read it, she turned deadly pale; a cold perspiration broke out on her temples, and for a moment she felt quite faint. But by a great effort she recovered herself, and read the letter again slowly, not missing a word. The letter was short, and said that the writer would take an early opportunity of calling on her to discuss some important affairs. Enclosed was a half sheet of paper, to which the writer directed her attention. The original, he said, had accidentally fallen into his hands, and this was a copy.

It was indeed a copy of the brief statement drawn up by Solomon Esher. Not a complete copy, however; for paragraphs 5 and 6 were omitted, possibly because they might have been offensive to the young lady. She was not long in making up her mind.

"I will see him," she said; "laugh at him, defy him. I have little fear for him. Ah! we shall see."

She looked splendid as she stood like an angry goddess, with the letter and enclosure crumpled up in her hand, —beautiful, determined, confident. Her eyes sparkled defiantly in the sunlight which streamed on her face. Her bosom rose and fell a trifle quicker than usual, her nostrils were slightly dilated, as she gave utterance to the words, breathing fearless confidence, "Ah! we shall see," Shortly, she seated herself at a Davenport desk, and commenced writing rapidly. One, two, three, at least a dozen letters she dashed off one after the other; then she prepared to answer the one which had so angered her. She took time

and pains about writing out a rough copy first. Thus it ran :

“Holford Hall, Saturday.

“DEAR SIR,—Your note is received. What is the meaning of the enclosed? Are you mad, or is this a foolish jest? I am curious to know. Even if you are a maniac, I trust you are a harmless one; as when I met you in Paris, and you did me some trifling service. I shall expect you here on Friday next, when perhaps you will explain your very extraordinary letter. Please come *sane*, if possible.—Yours truly,

MAUDE DE VERE.”

“Edward Melhuish, Esq.”

This was all she wrote; and after reading it over she sealed it, stamped it, and sent it to the post with the rest.

“On Friday we shall see,” she said to herself. “I do not flinch from the ordeal. I feel sure I shall be victorious.”

The day came on which she had invited Mr. Melhuish to visit her. She had left notice that if he called before the afternoon she was to be denied to him. However, he did not arrive before half-past three o'clock, and by her orders was at once shown to one of the best bed-rooms. In answer to his inquiries, he was informed that Miss de Vere would not be visible till five o'clock; dinner was at six. So, in some little confusion and agitation of mind, he strolled out into the grounds, and thought over the part he had to play. Evidently it was not a pleasant one; and it might have been thought he rather shirked the ordeal. However, on his return to the house he was told that Miss

de Vere would see him, and was at once ushered into her presence. She rose, and advancing to meet him, said in a manner perfectly unembarrassed,

"Well, Mr. Melhuish, you have come I see. Now I want an explanation of your extraordinary letter."

He was somewhat taken aback by this reception; but replied not in a very steady voice.

"There are many extraordinary things in this world, Miss de Vere."

"Granted, Mr. Melhuish; pray go on."

"What is there in the letter so very extraordinary?" he asked, more to gain time than anything else.

"What? Why, that statement numbered 1, 2, 3, 4. Ha, ha! he, he! Really it is too ridiculous."

Her laugh was clear and silvery, her eyes bright, her demeanour quite undaunted; and Edward Melhuish noting all these things, began to feel rather embarrassed.

"Well, Miss—Miss de Vere, to speak plainly, I happen to know more about this business than you imagine. There is truth in it, I know. If you are disposed to be friendly, all will be well."

"And if not?" she asked eagerly, while a threatening look darkened on her face.

"If not I am your enemy; and knowing what I know, I shall prove a dangerous one."

Again she laughed the same clear mocking laugh.

"My dear sir, you are under a delusion. Some one has made a dupe of you; and I request you at once to apologise to me for the unwarranted statement your letter contained, or explain yourself."

"I cannot apologise, and to explain might be unpleasant."

"Do not misunderstand me," she said sternly. "I do not intend to let matters rest so. Your statements, if made seriously, can only have been with a criminal intent. If as a joke, I am ready to receive your apology. If you have been the dupe of a practical joker or a villain, I will also forgive. If, however, you persist, I shall assuredly have you handed over to the police. I have sent for my lawyer Mr. Cardale ; he is now here ; and if you look from the window yonder you will see two of the rural police, also here at my request. I am not to be trifled with, believe me."

Edward Melhuish was astounded and aghast at the turn affairs had taken. Mr. Cardale here ! She had then dared to consult her lawyer about this business ! And looking from the window Mr. Melhuish saw two police-constables standing together some fifty yards off.

"You had better think it over," said Maude quietly. "We dine at six ; it is now half-past five. Come with me to the drawing-room, and do not let anything I have said disturb you. I see plainly, my dear sir, that you have been the victim of a hoax. You thought you possessed a tremendous secret, and without considering what you were doing, you posted off to try its effect. Come."

Then there flashed across his mind, "Suppose she should be right, and I utterly misled ? By Jove, what a fool I am making of myself !"

She led him quietly into the drawing-room, and introduced him to the neighbouring clergyman, his son, and two daughters ; also to some other gentlemen, and especially to Mr. Cardale.

"This, Mr. Cardale, is a friend of mine—Mr. Edward

Melhuish ; rather an eccentric young man, but I assure you quite harmless."

The lawyer looked surprised, and bowed coldly. He remembered that a few days before this person had called upon him and pestered him with what he considered most impertinent questions. "However," he said to himself, "if Miss De Vere chooses to receive him, I am bound to be civil."

Edward Melhuish every moment felt more uncomfortable and foolish. Every one present seemed to know and respect the young lady, his hostess ; and when Mr. Cardale and she drew on one side and entered into earnest conversation, his bewilderment was complete. He wished to put all matters at rest at once, and with that intention went up to the old lawyer the moment his fair ward left him.

"Pardon me, sir," he said ; "but, may I ask how long you have known this young lady, Miss De Vere?"

"From her childhood, sir," was the surprised reply.

"And may I further ask you——"

"No, sir, you may not," said Mr. Cardale testily, "I hate being questioned, and I do not choose to answer. You are a friend of Miss De Vere's, I suppose ; to me you are a stranger. If you have anything to ask about her or her affairs, speak to her. I do not wish to be questioned, and I will not answer."

At that moment dinner was announced and Mr. Melhuish soon found himself seated by one of the clergyman's daughters.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## SYDNEY DAVENPORT ARRIVES AT HOLFORD HALL.

No more was said on the subject that night. He had not an opportunity, had he wished, to talk to the heiress, and resolved, not unwillingly, to defer the subject. In the morning she met him at the breakfast table, smiling, good-tempered, affable; she actually laughed at him; and finally he determined to apologise with the best possible grace, and make his peace, and declare that he had been made a dupe of. Be it remarked that now he really began to have a faint suspicion that such was actually the case; or else that Solomon Esher, usually so acute, had been most egregiously mistaken. Everything seemed to favour the supposition that he had embarked in a rash, almost ridiculous, undertaking. He had expected to have found the mistress of Holford Hall covered with confusion—bowed down with terror. Behold! she laughed in his face; and instead of threatening, he found himself threatened.

After some little self-communing, he made up his mind and boldly told her that he had been made a fool of, but by whom he would not say. He begged pardon for his folly, and hoped he might be forgiven.

Maude de Vere laughed, and freely forgave him.

"When you come back from Paris, Mr. Melhuish, I



shall be very happy to see you. I like you rather; your innocence is quite amusing."

His cheeks tingled at this badinage; but putting the best possible face upon it, he took his leave and went back to Paris.

He at once sought out Solomon Esher; and that wily old schemer saw in a moment by his looks that he had failed.

"What! what!" cried he, chuckling; "so you have been off on a fool's errand, and have returned with a fool's luck. He, he, he! ho, ho, ho!"

"What the devil do you mean?" growled Melhuish.

"What I say. You've been trying to bully the heiress, and she has laughed at you."

"What do you know about it?"

"Why, my good innocent young man, do you think I was going to let you pry into my affairs—discover my secrets? I saw what you were after, and laid a little trap for you. Dear me!—he, he, he!—how easily you fell into it! Did you ever pick up a bit of paper on the floor here with paragraphs numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,—eh? Oh, you cunning young dog! He, he, he!"

Edward Melhuish gave vent to a volley of oaths and rushed away.

"Fool, fool!" he cried wildly, "I could kill myself when I think of what an idiot I have been. That crafty old thief Solomon Esher wrote that paper and dropped it purposely that I might pick it up and be misled. He wished to ruin me with her; but I will be avenged on him. I will frustrate his scheme, if possible, whatever it may be."

Imagine with what gleeful joy the old quack chuckled to himself over this triumph.

Edward Melhuish was right all the time ; but Miss De Vere's courage and self-possession, and his own weakness and stupidity, had ruined him. At that moment Edward Melhuish was cursing himself as the most egregious fool in Paris.

And so perhaps he was ; not, as he thought, for too rashly coming to a conclusion, but for too readily giving it up.

Sydney Davenport was coming to visit Miss Maude de Vere. For four months and more she had been installed at Holford Hall as mistress, and as yet had not seen him. But now he was coming by appointment. Evidently she thought much of him ; for she gave most minute and particular orders as to what was to be done, and where he was to be shown on his arrival. He was expected before dusk in the evening ; and she had given directions that first he should be shown to his room, and that she should then be apprised of his coming. He came, as anticipated, just about seven o'clock, when the autumn light was fading into misty grayness. Maude de Vere went first to her dressing-room, and carefully arranged her hair in a peculiar manner, possibly thinking to awaken remembrances of times gone by. She dressed herself too with scrupulous attention to every detail, and then descended to the drawing-room. She rang for lights ; and when a moderator-lamp was brought, herself arranged the degree of light, and placed it on a table at the side of the room farthest from the door. Then she ordered that Mr. Davenport should be shown to her as soon as he came down from his room.

Two minutes after he entered ; and she, half rising to receive him, spoke.

"You will excuse me Mr. Davenport," she said. "I am not quite well to-day ; I have quite a distressing headache."

She spoke in a low tone, and apparently with some restraint. He seemed to start at her voice, and came forward a few paces quickly, peering dubiously into the dimly-lighted room. He had just come through the brightly-lighted hall, and so it appeared the darker to his unaccustomed eyes. As they shook hands, a singular thrill shot through him, as it were of a magnetic sympathy.

"I keep the light low on account of my headache," she said apologetically. "I trust when next you come I may be better able to entertain you."

"I fear you have a cold," he said, scarce knowing what to talk about ; he felt so strange a sensation, a sort of dim foreboding that all was not right. By degrees his eyes saw plainer, and he noticed that Miss de Vere had greatly improved in appearance. She looked taller, more developed in figure, and certainly handsomer in the face.

"I believe that tiresome lamp will go out altogether directly," she said. "I turned it low purposely ; but it gets worse every moment."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## AN UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW.

MAUDE DE VERE rose, and going to the table where the lamp was, turned it on so as to throw a good light. As she walked to her seat, Sydney Davenport had a good view of her face and figure. An exclamation broke from him ; and he started from his chair, gazing strangely at her the while. She calmly turned and confronted him.

"What is the matter, Mr. Davenport?—do I frighten you?"

"Nothing, nothing—I beg your pardon ; but really for the moment you brought up such memories of the past to my mind, that I fancied I saw a ghost."

"Ah !" she said, slowly, sadly, and in a sweet plaintive tone. "You were thinking of poor Maude Luton ; you do not think of her oftener than I do myself, I am sure. She is constantly in my thoughts."

He was still looking at her in a puzzled, amazed sort of way.

"Yes," he said falteringly, "I was ; that is to say—the fact is, Miss De Vere, as you walked across the room just now, I thought I saw Maude Luton before me."

"We bear a singular resemblance to each other," she said, "*Do you remember the first time you ever saw me you mistook me and called me Maude ?*"

He did remember right well, as was the case with every trifling event which related to the unhappy Maude Luton.

"Yes, yes," he said with a sigh; "I remember very well. Let us talk about her. How is the poor girl? You do not know, cannot imagine how I feel for her."

"Can you feel for her more deeply than I do?" was the reply.

"Yes, I think I do,—more than anyone. Do you know, Miss De Vere, I—" He suddenly interrupted himself, and remained silent.

"What were you about to say?—something about Maude Luton?"

"Yes."

"Then pray say it."

"No, not now; some day perhaps I may tell you,—not now—not now."

Presently he grew more composed, as he recovered from the powerful agitation which evidently affected him; and they talked quietly about the patient and her chance of recovery.

"I mean to go over and see her; I must go over and see her," he said all at once, as if the words were pressed upon him by some irresistible impulse.

She was sitting near enough to him to lay her hand on his arm, as she said earnestly.

"Not yet—not yet; promise me not yet, for her own sake."

"I feel an unconquerable desire to go at once," he said. "I know not whence it comes or what it is; but there is something within me ever urging me to seek out Maude

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Luton. I have a glimmering hope that I may be instrumental in saving her from the dreadful doom which threatens her,—a life of mental darkness !”

After more conversation he rose and took his leave. All through the interview he had experienced the strangest sensation. Maude Luton was constantly in his mind, and it was with difficulty he could divest himself of the idea that she was actually present. The result of the interview was so far satisfactory, in that he satisfied himself the unfortunate Maude Luton was well cared for, and had the first medical advice. But in every other respect it was quite the reverse. He did not like Miss de Vere's manner—so totally altered from what it used to be. Indeed he had difficulty in realising or thinking of her as the young, light-hearted, somewhat weak-minded girl he remembered a year or so ago.

However, this gradually wore off as he saw her more often. Not so, however, the singular feeling of doubt and the constantly-recurring impression that Maude Luton was present whenever he talked of her.

Sydney Davenport shortly came to reside at Burcot Manor, and busied himself in improving the estate, and also in the affairs of the county, of which he was now a magistrate. As for Maude De Vere, her life passed on apparently smoothly and unruffled ; but to a close observer it was obvious that the girl was suffering acutely. There was a strangeness about her eyes ; at times they wore a frightened look, at others one of utter weariness and despair. When Sydney Davenport visited her she was wont to brighten up for a brief space. She would hang on his words, watch his face ; and on her features there might

have been read at such times a longing, yearning expression, as though she pined for sympathy and love. One afternoon she reminded him of a sentence which he once left abruptly unfinished. It was concerning Maude Luton, and he had said that perhaps he would tell her all some day. On this occasion he was in a mood to keep his promise.

"I do not see any reason why I should not tell you, Miss De Vere," he said, "I am not ashamed to own that I loved Maude Luton deeply, passionately, with a love whose strength I never knew until this misfortune befell her, and she was lost to me for ever."

His voice faltered as he spoke, and his listener well knew with what deep sincerity he spoke. She herself trembled with emotion, and knew not what to say. At length she asked, "could you never love again, Mr. Davenport?"

"Never, never. I wish now that I had spoken to Maude Luton before she went abroad, and told her my feelings. I might have done so; but some trifling misunderstanding or quarrel prevented me, and I let her go and made no sign."

"Would to Heaven you had!" exclaimed Miss De Vere, passionately. "What misery, what wretchedness, what crime even would you not have prevented! You could have saved her, Sydney Davenport, and you neglected to do so. It is your fault that she is now lost."

"My fault," he cried aghast at her words and excited manner. "Great Heaven! do not say so Miss De Vere. I would lay down my life to save her at this moment."

"Would you forgive her if she had done wrong?" asked the young lady, dropping her voice to a low, solemn pitch; "would you take her to your heart if she had been

led away by ambitious and covetous views to sin against God, and against one who never injured her? I ask you, could you forgive her and take her to your heart?"

"I could, and would, so help me Heaven!" he answered impetuously. "I know she has great faults, that strong passions and evil thoughts dispute sway in her breast with goodness and amiability. Her nature is one that requires guiding with a strong, firm hand. But what avails it talking? All is over now."

While he was speaking, Maude De Vere was torn by a conflict of emotions. At one moment she made a step forward with clasped hands, and it seemed as though she would throw herself at his feet. But she hesitated, drew back panting and trembling, and waited for him to go on.

"I will bid you adieu now," he said. "I am ashamed of this weakness; but I could not help it."

When alone she threw herself on a couch. "Oh, why did he not say this before?" Now it is too late; too late. I cannot, dare not tell him!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Shortly after this Maude Luton had another visitor. This was no other than old Solomon Esher. She by no means treated him in the bold defiant manner she did Edward Melhuish. In the old doctor she knew she had a wily antagonist, and in her heart feared him. They had a long interview, the subject on which they talked being known only to themselves. When it was ended, Solomon went away chuckling, and Maude De Vere retired to her room, very pale, and looking harassed and gloomy. Obviously the interview had not been of a pleasant nature.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE MARRIAGE-REGISTER FOUND—CONCLUSION.

SYDNEY DAVENPORT rode swiftly up the avenue to Holord Hall in this autumn evening. His brow was gloomy, his lips compressed, face pale, and his eyes gleamed in a way which indicated a ruffled mind. Telling the footman that he wished to see Miss de Vere instantly, he entered the drawing-room. Scarcely had he passed within when he heard the sound of a piano and a woman's voice singing. He stopped, and as he listened, what little colour he had faded from his face, and he grew pale as death, even to the lips. His whole frame trembled, and he grasped a chair for support. "That voice! that voice! It is herself or her spirit," he murmured. "It cannot be Maude de Vere, she does not sing. It is Maude Luton." Then, scarce knowing what he did, he went out on the verandah, and approached the open window whence the sound proceeded.

Looking in, he saw Miss De Vere seated at the piano,—the same Miss De Vere he had known for months past. Yes, the same actually; but the voice was the voice of Maude Luton; and as he listened, Miss De Vere faded away from his mind, and it was Maude Luton he saw.

She paused suddenly.

"Maude! Maude Luton!" he said.

Then there was a slight scream, and they stood confronting one another. His eyes were bent searchingly on

her face, and by degrees there came an expression of certain, unmistakable recognition.

"Maude Luton," he said again; and that was all. Her eyes fell before his. She trembled violently; and hesitating one brief moment, threw herself at his feet.

"Mercy! mercy!" she said; "Sydney Davenport, you have discovered me; you have conquered. Remember your words; you said you would pardon her, and take her, though erring, to your heart. She now kneels at your feet. Maude Luton kneels and prays for mercy, and pity, for the sake of the love you said you bore her." Her sobs almost made her speech unintelligible; her hair becoming disordered, fell in luxuriant profusion over her face and swept his feet. He gently raised her.

"Maude! Maude Luton!" he said; "what comedy, what drama, or hideous dream is this?"

"No comedy, no dream; but truth," she said. "You called me by my name. I saw you knew all. Ah! have pity and save me. Save me from myself."

"Compose yourself," he said gravely. "Be seated and tell me all." She obeyed, and in faltering accents, interrupted often by tears, she told him all—made him a long, and true confession.

"You say she is indeed mad?" asked Davenport.

"Yes, yes; there is no doubt of that. It was this knowledge which first tempted me. Then everything turned out with such fatal precision exactly as I wished. It seemed as though Satan purposely threw the proper weapons in my way. I knew it was very, very wicked; but then, I argued, it could do her no harm, and the estates were lawfully mine. The extraordinary likeness between us made

things easy. I did not fear my Cousin David recognising me ; but I did fear lest you should. Now tell me what to do. This very moment I will, summon the household and proclaim myself an impostor."

"No, no ; it is not needful at present. You have sinned, Maude, deeply ; but not beyond forgiveness. Pray to the Almighty for pardon ; and may He grant it.

"Then you do not hate me, do not scorn me, despise me for my wickedness?"

"No, Maude ; I pity you, and will endeavour to extricate you from your present false position."

She shuddered and said. "Ah ! it will be dreadful to confess myself an impostor, to be compelled to proclaim myself a wicked schemer. Oh, that I could die !"

"Maude, there is yet hope. I repeat you have done no injury, though you are guilty of the intent."

"What do you mean?"

"This. I the other day discovered the clue which I have so long vainly sought. I feel certain from what I have found out that you are indeed the daughter of Stanton de Vere, born in lawful wedlock. Such being the case, you are rightfully called Maude De Vere, and are rightful heiress of these estates."

"But the proof ? the proof thereof?"

"To-night I start for Scotland, the whither a trusty agent has preceded me. I heard from him this morning, and his information convinces me that it is as I say. You were mistaken in the place. You thought it was at *Kilmarnock*, in Ayrshire, where the proofs of the marriage should be sought. Accidentally I heard that there is another place with a name exactly similar, all but one let-

ter—*Kilmaronock*. My agent has already discovered proof of the marriage nearly twenty years ago. It is only necessary that I should go and reduce everything to legal form. For that purpose I take a sharp lawyer with me. Farewell now. I shall return in a week, meanwhile let things go on as they are. You have sinned; but it will do no good making a public scandal. Adieu, my poor Maude!"

She clung to him weeping and sobbing, and could scarce prevail upon herself to let him go. "Oh, Sydney! I love you so. I will be your slave!"

He kissed her forehead, and left her to thought and mingled emotions, of pleasure and bitter pain.

\* \* \* \* \*

But it was fated that the drama should not be played out without other characters appearing on the stage to complete the tableau. Miss Dolly Clarke, vindictive and spiteful, was now armed with a deadly weapon, and had, moreover, a willing assistant in Melhuish, who burned with mortification and resentment at the scornful rejection of his offer to Miss De Vere. Accordingly, now that he was again convinced that his first suspicion, or rather the certainty he felt on finding the slip of paper with Solomon's statement, was correct, he prepared to act on his knowledge; and if he could not obtain her, the object of his passion, he would ruin and expose her. With this object he hurried up to London and consulted an unscrupulous lawyer. When apprised of the facts, this person informed him he could at any moment expose the girl and consign her to a criminal prison. This, however, was scarcely his object. He designed to force her to come to terms and accept himself as a husband.

With Miss Dolly Clarke, however, it was far different. She gloated in the thought that her enemy was in her power, and determined to use that power ruthlessly. Once she had possession of all the facts, she cared little for her coadjutor Edward Melhuish, being fully determined to take her own course. This she did with consummate malignity, and more skill than one would have given her credit for. She was acquainted with a neighbouring magistrate, and determined to make use of him in his judicial capacity. Nor did she falter in the carrying out of this her plan.

All being in readiness, the blow fell. On the very day on which Sydney Davenport returned, successful, triumphant, the catastrophe came. He had not yet arrived; but having heard from him, she expected him every hour. About two in the afternoon she was told that a lady and three gentlemen had called to see her; but refused to give their names. She carelessly ordered that they should be shown into the drawing-room, where she would join them.

Utterly unsuspecting of danger, she swept haughtily into the room, wondering who those people could be who thus audaciously intruded without giving their names. At once she saw Dolly Clarke, and coloured-up with anger. That amiable young lady rose and stared rudely and offensively at her. Then turning to a person in black, whom Maude recognised as a pettifogging attorney of the neighbouring town, she said: "Yes, that is her; I can swear to her."

"What is your pleasure, gentlemen, and yours, *young woman?*" asked Maude angrily; for the demeanour and staring of all the party annoyed her greatly.

"Young woman, eh! Wait a bit and we shall see, Miss Luton. Yes, Luton I said. Look! see how she turns

pale! She knows her name; knows she is an impostor; and that she is not Miss De Vere, but Maude Luton,—nobody's daughter!"

Maude turned white with passion; but knew not what to say.

"You hear what this young lady states," said the attorney. "She makes an accusation against you. She says that you are a fraudulent impostor; and that you are not Miss De Vere, but have assumed her name, presuming on your audacity and the likeness between you."

"What have I to say? Nothing to you, or such as you," she cried angrily, stamping her foot on the ground, and pointing to the door. "Begone, or I will order my servants to turn you out." Then spoke another of the party,—Mr. Atherstone, a small proprietor and justice of the peace. He was proud of his judicial authority, and took every opportunity to exercise it. "This will not do, young lady. An accusation has been made—a very serious accusation; and it is incumbent on you to answer it, and that in a satisfactory manner."

"By what right do you speak?" asked Maude defiantly. "I decline to hold any conversation with you."

"By what right? By the right and majesty of the law, whose representative I am. I am a magistrate of this county; and this person," looking towards the third man, "is a police-officer in plain clothes." There was a silence of some half a minute. Maude looked from one to the other wildly. She knew now that she was in the toils. Her eye fell upon Dolly Clarke whose face beamed with malignant triumph. This restored her pride.

"Do as you please," she said, "in the absence of my legal adviser, I decline to answer any questions."

"In that case, I shall make out a warrant for your committal. I am a magistrate, and have full power to act. Officer, do your duty." The man advanced towards her firmly, but respectfully.

"It is my duty, miss, I must take you into custody."

"Hold!" was heard in a loud commanding voice. "I too am a magistrate. I order you to desist,—you, officer, and you, Mr. Atherstone, who it seems to me are somewhat in a hurry to make out a warrant."

"An accusation of felony has been made," replied the justice of the peace; "and it is my duty to order her committal."

"Do so at your peril. I am here on behalf of that young lady, and am prepared to prove that she is indeed Miss Maude De Vere, and the rightful heiress of this Hall and estate."

"That is impossible!" cried Dolly Clarke, in a shrill tone. "She is Maude Luton. I was at school with her, and cannot be deceived."

"She was known once as Maude Luton; but nevertheless she is, and always was, Maude De Vere, eldest daughter of Stanton De Vere and Maude his wife, the sister of the late Dr. Luton."

"What do you mean?"

"I knew Mr. Stanton de Vere," put in the magistrate; "and never heard that he was married but once."

"Nevertheless he was married—lawfully married at Kilmarnock in Scotland; and now at this moment I have

the documents proving it. This young lady is Miss Maude de Vere; and, as the eldest daughter of Stanton de Vere, is his heiress, according to the way in which the estates are left."

"But the other daughter, the young one—she who was known here as Miss de Vere?"

"Her name also is De Vere; and as her father, from some strange fancy, caused her to be christened Maude, she too, is Maude de Vere. But this girl, the eldest, is the heiress, and rightfully bears the name she is now known by."

"But why was this kept quiet?—why not proclaimed openly? Why the mystery?"

"Mystery! I see no mystery. Is it not reasonable enough that this young lady, when she discovered who she was, should prefer to assume her name quietly, rather than that there should be a talk and scandal about it? You have been very nearly making a ridiculous and costly mistake, Atherstone. You yourself as a magistrate must be well aware of the penalty a man of property would have to pay for 'false imprisonment.' And if this young lady had been rashly given into custody on your warrant, it would have been so held. Indeed I am sure that had you committed such a gross mistake you would have been removed from the bench."

"Well, well, Mr. Davenport, after what I have heard, of course I withdraw. But the case was put to me so strongly, especially by this young lady," turning to Dolly Clarke, "that I felt compelled to act."

"That young woman is actuated by feelings of paltry malice," said Davenport severely. She knew her as



Maude Luton, and was envious of her. She was expelled from a ladies' school, where she was in company with this young lady."

"Under the circumstances we will withdraw," said the discomfited magistrate.

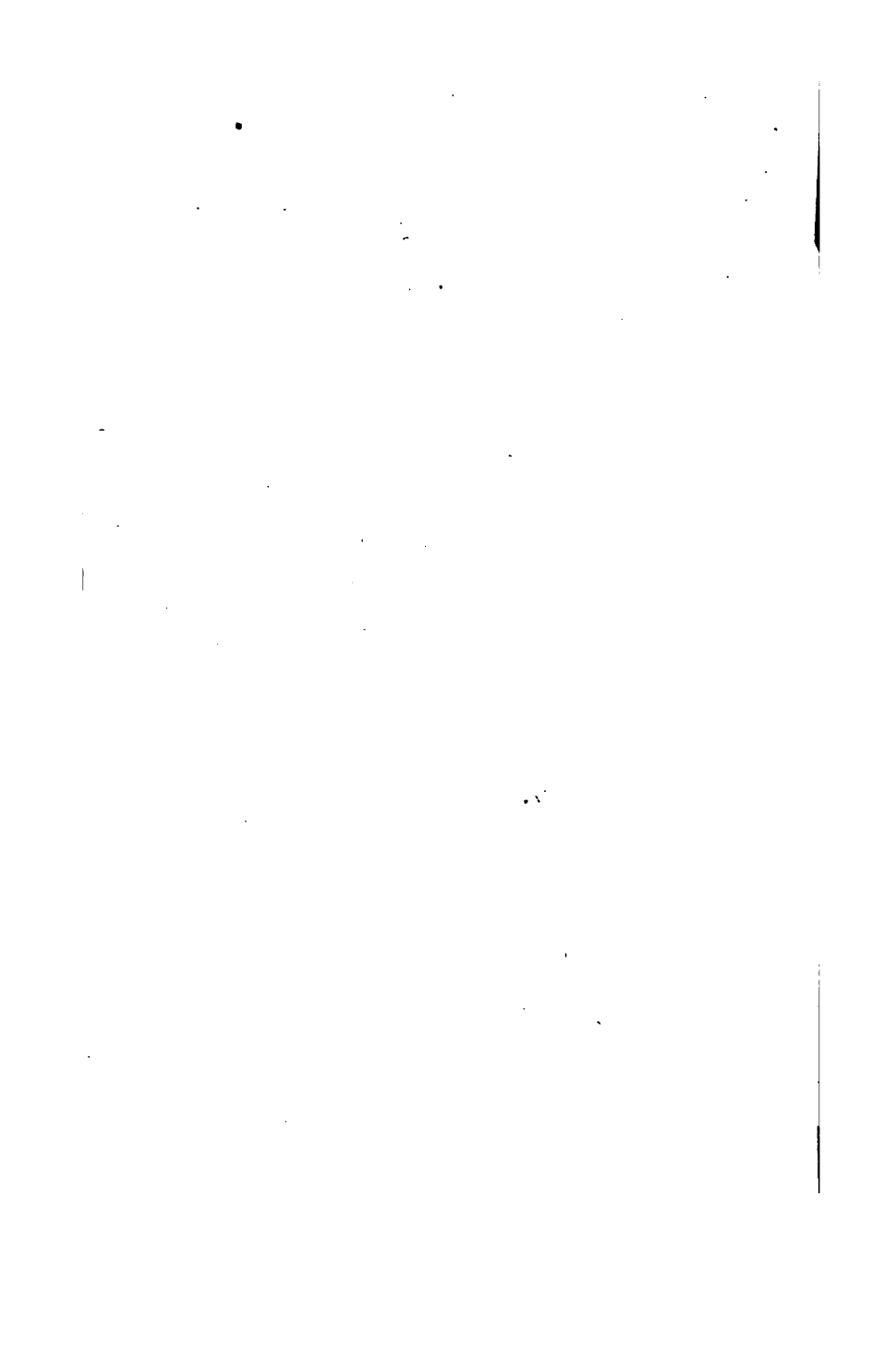
"Yes, certainly," said the lawyer, equally discomfited. Dolly Clarke burst into tears—tears of rage—and left the room with the others.

"Saved! saved!" cried Maude; and sobbing hysterically, she threw herself into Davenport's arms. "Oh, how can I ever thank you, my preserver, my friend, my love!"

He kissed her face tenderly, and replied, "You can repay me, Maude, by striving to subdue your proud, ambitious heart—by being a kind, gentle, loving woman, and my true wife."

Little need for her to give her answer in words. Her heart spoke; her eyes, dim with tears, told of her joyful acquiescence; and Maude de Vere, once known as Maude Luton, in due time became Maude Davenport. She had sinned in thought, but was mercifully spared the full punishment of her fault; and under the guidance of a mind stronger than her own, and better balanced, and with higher principles, she doubtless became a good woman and loving wife.

THE END.







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